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Hold Fast

Building a spiritually rooted dissent.

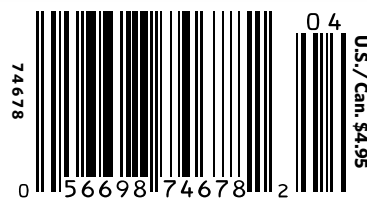


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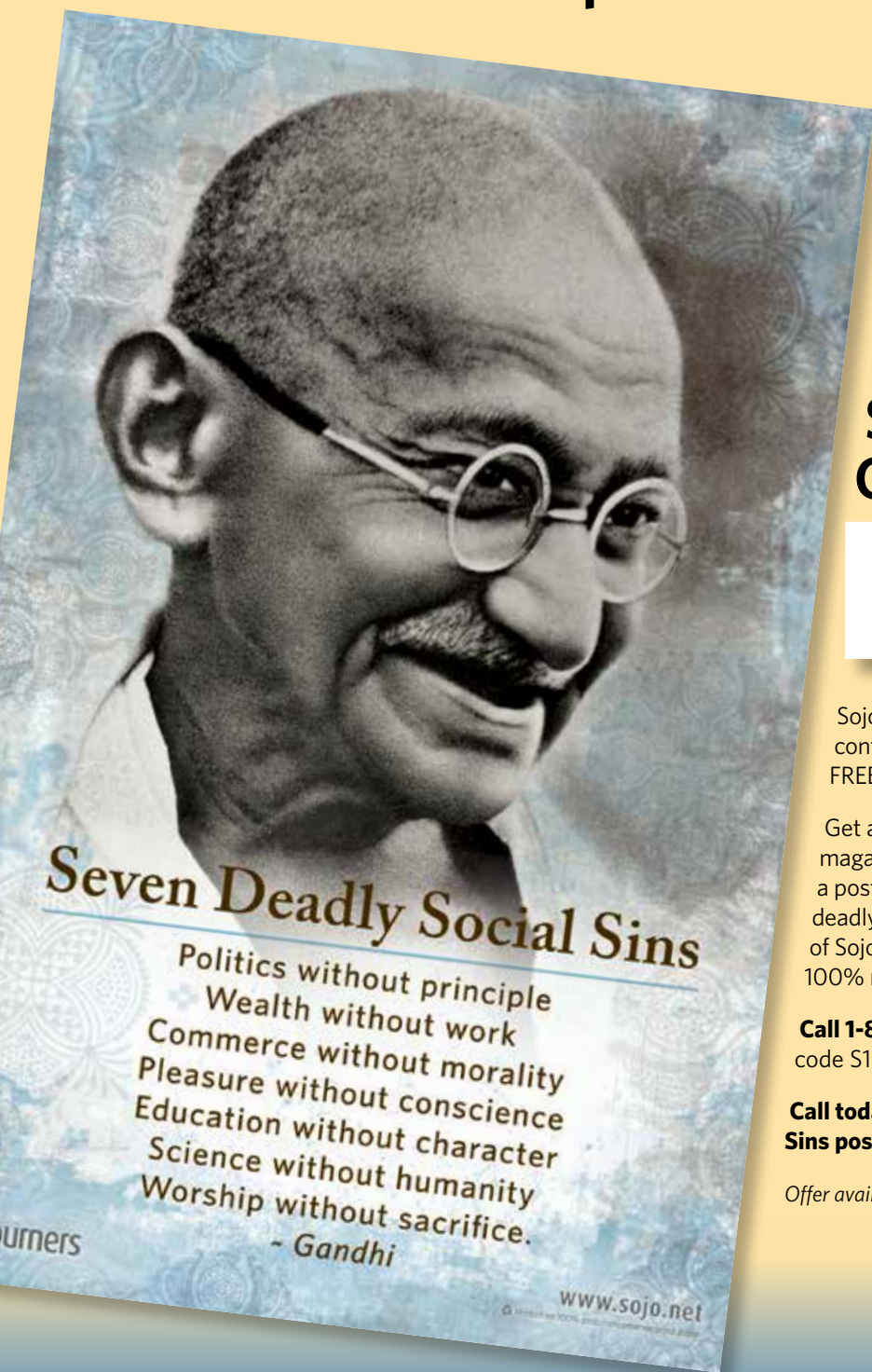
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SOMETIMES HUMOR says it best: “My desire to be well-informed is currently at odds with my desire to remain sane,” explained a cartoon by David Sipress that made its way around the internet in the first few weeks of the Trump presidency.

We know the feeling. As Christians, we want to welcome the stranger, stand in solidarity with Muslims, care for the earth, heal the sick, and protect the vulnerable—but what are we supposed to do when everything is threatened at once? When it’s so hard to focus, we’re tempted to just keep refreshing our newsfeed and let ourselves get swept away in a diffuse sea of outrage that quickly evaporates into despair (and leaves us feeling pretty crabby).

“Spiritual disequilibrium,” Wesley Granberg-Michaelson calls it. Yes, we can be heartened by those who’ve flooded the streets in peaceful protest, but we must remember: “resistance alone does not sustain a community.” Instead, Granberg-Michaelson, a former managing editor and longtime friend of *Sojourners*, urges followers of Jesus to anchor ourselves more deeply in the bedrocks of our faith: memory, truth, community, suffering, solidarity. More Jesus, less Twitter squabbles.

And when we engage these spiritual practices, we find ourselves with something



that’s more useful than internet ire. In this issue, Reta Halteman Finger dives deep into a Bible study on Pontius Pilate and emerges with surprising insight on post-truth politics. And as Betsy Shirley reports, the people of St. Paul’s church in Richmond, Va., grapple with memory and suffering in their community and end up learning about racial reconciliation.

As Granberg-Michaelson reminds us, “Christian communities committed to prophetic witness in society endure when they learn to nurture the spiritual depth of practices that equip them for the long run.” ■

Letters

Eye of the Beholder

In “Where Protestantism Went Wrong” (February 2017), Wesley Granberg-Michaelson rightly critiques some of the consequences of the Reformation. Surely he is inaccurate, however, in arguing that “the Reformation bred a mistrust of aesthetics.” It would be more accurate to state that it promoted a different aesthetic than that prevalent in Catholicism. New England Puritans, for example, developed a “plain style” in literature and architecture evident in the accessible prose of William Bradford’s *Of Plymouth Plantation* and the beauty of many Congregational churches still standing in town squares. This plain style influenced modern literature and the “form follows function” aesthetic of much modern architecture. Sometimes, to quote a fine expression of the Protestant aesthetic, “’tis a gift to be simple.”

Walter Hesford
Moscow, Idaho

Name Drop

Jim Wallis has asked the question that I, and I am sure others, have been wrestling with for some time: “What is an evangelical?” (“White Evangelicals and the Election,” January 2017). As an 81-year-old Lutheran pastor, I have been advocating that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America drop the word “evangelical” from our name.

Listen to women’s and girls’ stories. Listen. And listen. And listen.

The word has been hijacked; the original meaning has been perverted! Retaining the word in our church’s name distorts the very heart of our identity. The change should not be that significant for Lutherans; when “evangelicals” meet, the ELCA is usually absent. It is sad but true that other words must be employed to convey the powerful identity that the word evangelical once held.

Bernard Kern
North Richland Hills, Texas

Stick to the Facts

I was disappointed in your January 2017 issue’s exclusive focus on the danger Trump poses because of a “racist, misogynistic, ethnocentric brand of nationalism” and policies that likely will hurt poor, vulnerable people (“Is America Possible?” by Heath W. Carter). What of his cavalier attitude toward facts, evidence, and truth, such as his disputing the overwhelming scientific evidence for human-caused global warming? When our culture is on a binge of finding “truth” in unwarranted places, and people are believing what they want to believe no matter how far off the mark (with the encouragement of our president),

our democracy is in serious, long-term danger.

Roger Brooks
Madison, Wisconsin

Stop Talking

In David Gushee’s November 2016 piece on abortion (“The Abortion Impasse”), where are women’s voices? Where is the acknowledgment that there are no women’s voices here? Gushee supports not banning abortion. In *some* cases. I get that. But the rhetoric, implicit and explicit, embodied in such statements and phrases as “abortion is the sad song that never ends,” “the everyday ‘garden variety abortions’ go on and on,” and “that miserable drive to the abortion clinic” send chills of exclusivity, domination, privilege down this reader’s spine. “What is an anxious Christian to do about all this?” Listen to women’s and girls’ stories. Listen. And listen. And listen.

Priscilla Atkins
Holland, Michigan

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BY JIM WALLIS

Robin Hood in Reverse



THE RICHEST EIGHT people in the world, according to an Oxfam report this January, own more wealth between them than the poorest 50 percent of humanity—3.6 billion people.

Let's make that clear: Eight people own more wealth than 3.6 billion people. That is simply grotesque. And it is the type of fact that needs to break through the complacency and routine of our daily lives, and the latest outrages of the U.S. president, and spur us to demand effective collective action to change course.

Many people don't spend much time thinking about the difference between income inequality and wealth inequality, but it's important to understand that *wealth* inequality is both harder to fix and

to and helped exacerbate a shameful level of wealth inequality. As the Pew Research Center documented in 2014, the median white household in the U.S. is *13 times* wealthier than the median black household and *10 times* wealthier than the median Latino household. The most obvious consequence of this massive gap is that it is often passed down from one generation to the next. When we talk about white privilege, this element of tangible inherited wealth and the huge racial wealth gap is often overlooked.

WHEN PEOPLE bring up the problems of global wealth inequality, it seems immediately to set off alarm bells among some conservatives, who say that by denouncing wealth inequality we are advocating for "socialism" or "redistribution of wealth." It is true that putting an entire economy in the hands of government has produced bad results and sometimes totalitarianism.

But the fact that we live in a global economy where eight people can have the combined wealth of 3.6 billion people is, to me, conclusive proof that redistribution of some of that wealth from the top to the bottom is sorely needed. And we need to acknowledge all the ways that redistribution of wealth from the bottom and the middle of the economy to the top happens every day due to how financial, taxation, and political systems are run. So instead of redistribution *to* the top, it's time we creatively consider redistribution *from* the top.

This should not be a controversial notion. In fact, many countries, including the United States, already try to do this. One way is through progressive taxation, which is why people with higher annual incomes pay higher rates of federal income tax. More important,

it's the thinking that informs taxes such as the estate tax and the capital gains tax, which collect some of the wealth from those who have the most to spare and use it to fund programs that benefit society's least wealthy.

TO THE CREDIT of the world's wealthiest couple, Bill and Melinda Gates have invested significant portions of their wealth into their charitable foundation and have encouraged their peers to do the same. The Gates family and other very wealthy people such as Warren Buffet also favor progressive taxation and retaining the estate tax, and Buffet has famously criticized the injustice of his secretary paying a higher effective income tax rate than he does. These models of progressive government taxation of wealth and voluntary philanthropy are not mutually exclusive, and both should be intensified to counter worsening global wealth inequality.

Unfortunately, Congress seems committed to passing large tax cuts that will again disproportionately benefit the wealthy, allowing them to shield even more of their wealth. One of the greatest political hypocrisies of the modern political era will be to watch President Donald Trump, the self-heralded champion of the common person, become the great implementer of these massive tax cuts for wealthy people like him.

As Gandhi once said, "The world has enough for everyone's needs, but not everyone's greed." What would loving your neighbor as yourself, following the words of Jesus, mean for tax policy? I doubt if the White House and the Congress will be asking that question. ■

Jim Wallis is editor-in-chief of Sojourners magazine.

The recovery of financial markets has been very good—for the already wealthy.

harder to justify, and it has enormous consequences that resonate over multiple generations. The reality that the Oxfam report makes plain is that even while global extreme poverty has seen dramatic reductions over the last couple of decades, global wealth continues to be concentrated at the very top, into fewer and fewer hands.

The recovery of global financial markets since the crash of 2008 has been very good for the already wealthy, but for those who didn't have many assets to begin with, the recovery of the stock market has benefited them far less. To put it bluntly, the class of the people who had the most to do with causing the crisis ended up benefiting the most from it.

In the United States, the legacy of systemic racism has both led

By Sandi Villarreal

Defending an Independent Press

There's a reason why freedom of the press and religious freedom reside together in the First Amendment.

ONE SPACE WHERE I find rest, amid the noise of living and working in Washington, D.C., sits directly in the heart of the hustle: the Newseum, dedicated to the defense of Amendment 1 to the U.S. Constitution.

It may be an odd choice, since it exhibits the front page of 60 newspapers each morning, each listing the harrowing headlines I'm trying to escape. But in this space, dedicated to education on our First Amendment freedoms, I find special solace.

Etched on a large window overlooking Pennsylvania Avenue between the White House and the Capitol are these words: "Freedom of Press Speech Religion."

There is not much breathing room between those freedoms inherent to all Americans, nor between those listed separately: freedom of assembly and petition.

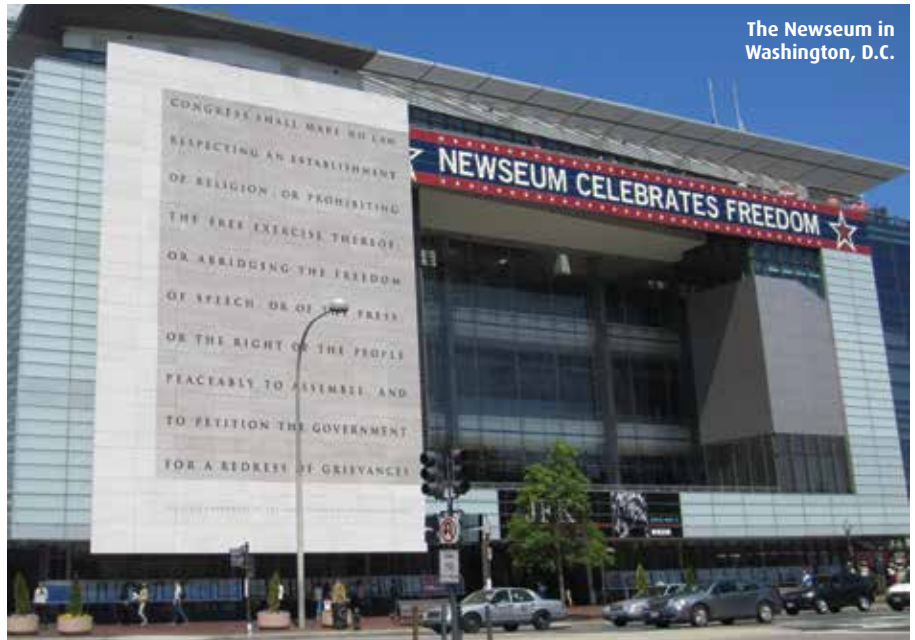
It's a well-placed reminder about freedoms many Americans take for granted. In 2016, 39 percent of Americans could not name a single one of them. Fifty-four percent could name freedom of speech, but only 17 percent and 11 percent could name freedom of religion and freedom of the press, respectively.

When freedoms don't "feel" threatened, it's easy to take them for granted.

Enter 2017. Already this year, we've experienced attacks on the freedom of religion as evidenced by the surge in Islamophobic and anti-Semitic attacks and the Trump administration's failure to mention Jews or anti-Semitism in its Holocaust Remembrance Day statement (a stark departure from the previous six administrations). We've seen lawyers spill pro bono hours in airports defending the freedom of religion by enforcing legal protections for international travelers in the face of what appeared to be a "religious test" for entering the country.

People of faith across the U.S. and across party lines rightly have been outraged at potential infringement of religious liberty under the Trump administration.

But where is the moral response to the intentional destabilizing of an independent press? Don't we understand that religious



The Newseum in Washington, D.C.

liberty and freedom of the press go hand in hand in the Constitution?

AT ITS CORE, freedom of the press is established to hold governmental powers accountable to the citizens. This is why it's referred to as the "fourth estate." It provides checks and balances on the other three

perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives."

Because of this, I'm less concerned with whether or not the Trump administration boots the White House press corps out of the James Brady Press Briefing Room to

When freedoms don't "feel" threatened, it's easy to take them for granted.

powers: the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court.

Much like free practice of religion within our borders, freedom of the press is indifferent to power structures. In fact, a robust press is a direct challenge to power, both friendly and hostile, and it was intended to be.

James Madison, known for his pivotal role in shaping the Constitution, put it this way:

"A popular government without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or

a site half a block away. Some of the best journalism can happen outside sanctioned access and the sound bites delivered by Sean Spicer.

Propaganda, however, does concern me. The intentional spreading of allegations or misconstrued facts to further one's own cause or to damage an opposing cause, especially in pursuit of political power, is always dangerous and reduces peoples' ability for self-governance.

As Christians we are committed by our faith to tell the truth, to reject falsehoods or lies, and to avoid speaking unjustly

against our neighbor. When Christians lose the ability to discern between fact-based reporting and fringe opinion, there is grave spiritual danger. Extreme headlines shared quickly without regard to truth is tantamount to spreading rumors. Scripture provides plenty of warning here: "Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark" (James 3:5).

By Jasper Vaughn

Combating Off-Field Violence

Sexual assault casts a long shadow over athletics—even at Christian colleges.

I GREW UP dazzled by NBA champion Kobe Bryant taking over games and redefining precision—I could never look away when he was on the court. But the sexual assault accusations brought against him in 2003 are as much a part of Bryant's legacy as the night he dropped 81 points on the Toronto Raptors.

Domestic violence and sexual assault cast a long shadow over athletics, as much in Christian colleges as in secular universities or professional sports. Christian colleges should be held to a higher standard, however, because they have a gospel mission to shape disciples and protect the vulnerable, not just trade in talent.

That's why I was dismayed in November when Liberty University ("Training Champions for Christ since 1971") hired Ian McCaw as its new athletic director. McCaw resigned from Baylor University last year after he was sanctioned and placed on probation for his role in a widespread sexual assault scandal. The investigation into McCaw's negligence led an independent law firm to release "scathing findings" of an "overall perception that football was above the rules," and a complete lack of a "culture of accountability for misconduct."

Liberty President Jerry Falwell Jr.'s response? McCaw's tenure at Baylor "fits perfectly with where we see our sports programs going."

Professional sports are notorious for an institutional failure to hold sports figures accountable and to believe, respect, and protect victims of physical and sexual violence by those same figures. The NFL famously prioritizes player talent over women's safety

Both Christians and journalists are called to be rigorous in seeking truth, speaking truth, and practicing truth—which is one reason those words are pressed together on the Newseum window: "Freedom of Press Speech Religion." ■

Sandi Villarreal is web editor and chief digital officer for Sojourners.

and imposes punishment to offenders unevenly—an inconsistency that often has a racialized narrative.

Teams and scouts often overlook players' histories of violence if they show athletic promise. Commentators refer only to "off-the-field issues," as if assaulting a woman were the same as speeding. If you promote a violent game, don't sanitize the overflow of that violence.

Like the military (and in some cases, the church), sports institutions often rely on

If you promote a violent game, then don't sanitize the overflow.

internal "discipline" to handle allegations of physical or sexual abuse.

In Baylor's case, the independent review found "the football program's separate system of internal discipline ... improperly insulates football players from appropriate disciplinary consequences," putting students "at risk of future misconduct."

Often "internal discipline" translates as "mentorship." Former Dallas Cowboy and outspoken evangelical Michael Irvin, for example, actively mentors players who have, as Cowboys owner Jerry Jones puts it, "a unique set of circumstances" (meaning a history of violence). Irvin draws a distinction between "wickedness" and "weakness" in athletes; many criminal offenses they commit, in his view, are *not* a product of the same "wicked" nature that caused former New England Patriot Aaron Hernandez

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From the Archives

April 1984

Strength for the Next Step

I AM NOT really sure about what it means to love God, but I do know what it means to be loved by God; and while God's love for me is no guarantee against struggles, despair, or suicidal thoughts, it gives me the strength to take the next step. Psalm 139 has become one of my favorite statements about God's love for me and presence in my life.

The psalmist proclaims, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me; even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you" (Psalm 139:11-12). I am reminded by this proclamation that God is the ultimate reconciler of the contradictions of life. For even in the darkness God stands at the center and becomes as the light.

Because I am alive today I know that God has stood at the center of my despair and darkness and that out of that presence my will to continue was born. I am aware that I must simply be present to the power and love that have kept me from suicide, and that at the very core of my deepest despair or hottest rage stands God. I will be "held fast by his right hand" because there is no place that I can go either inwardly or outwardly where God is not already present. My hope is further undergirded by the knowledge that the contradictions of life in general and my life in particular are never final. ■

Catherine Meeks was director of Afro-American studies at Mercer University when this article appeared.



to commit murder, but rather result from personal "weakness"—lapses in character.

But Irvin, Jones, and NFL commissioner Roger Goodell increasingly blur the line between "wicked" and "weak," too often explaining away violence against women as personal weakness to be fixed "relationally" instead of institutionally.

A solely relational approach to combating violence against women will consistently fall short, in the same way that "a lot of the pastoral counseling" in situations of domestic abuse "is more hurtful than helpful because so many pastors have wanted to preserve the marriage at all costs," as Rev. Bob Owens observes. Many

clergy members hesitate to take practical steps to ensure women's safety.

The "It's On Us" campaign teaches student athletes to take the lead in ending campus assaults. The Drake Group focuses on protecting student athletes from the "corrosive aspects of commercialized college sports" and provides effective policies that schools can adopt. Building on efforts like these, Christian institutions must create a culture in which sinful abuse is combated systematically and violence is unacceptable. ■

Jasper Vaughn is the editorial assistant for Sojourners and a Davidson College Wildcats fan.

By Phil Wilmot

All Black Lives Matter

Seventeen percent of U.S. special forces deployed abroad are in Africa—where the U.S. is not (officially) at war.

REMEMBER WHEN the *Kony 2012* video went viral? The short documentary, produced by the controversial Invisible Children organization about brutal Ugandan rebel Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army, purportedly reached more than half of young adults in the U.S. when it was released. Young Christians across the country swarmed their elected representatives, urging action against Kony, which quickly legitimized Obama's deployment of U.S. military forces to hunt a relatively idle madman with depleted resources.

Since then, U.S. militarization in Africa has shown no sign of slowing. In 2006, according to *The Intercept*, "just 1 percent of [U.S.] commandos sent overseas were deployed in the U.S. Africa Command [AFRICOM] area of operations. In 2016, 17.26 percent of all U.S. Special Operations forces ... deployed abroad were sent to Africa." The U.S. admits to the existence of one permanent base in Africa, in Djibouti on the Gulf of Aden, while U.S. special forces are deployed in "more than 60 percent of the 54 countries on the continent."

Special operations and collaborations with proxy militias enable U.S. militarism in Africa to persist with very little public awareness or oversight—and wreak havoc on local populations.

"By keeping us in a state of perpetual war, the arms trade grows," said Norman Tumuhimbise, a Ugandan youth activist kidnapped and tortured in 2015 by a branch of Uganda's military that trains under U.S. anti-terror programs.

There is hope, however. While U.S. evangelicals in 2012 were lobbying Congress to deploy more troops, Africans were resisting theft by proxy militias of their land and natural resources. In 2013, I visited a community in the Amuru District in Uganda, along the Nile River. The previous year 60 women from that community had resisted President Museveni's directive to relinquish their land to foreign investors by stripping naked in front of the president, government officials, and business leaders. Following this powerful cultural indictment, Solidarity Uganda, a civil society nonprofit that teaches nonviolent strategy, offered training in this community on nonviolent action. Five villages of Amuru District united to form a land-protection movement.

Death threats, arson, and forced evictions against the movement has not slowed it down. In April 2015, Uganda's minister of lands and internal affairs arrived in Amuru to set new district boundaries, part of an effort to push people off their ancestral lands. Residents erected roadblocks.

Hundreds of schoolchildren marched with leaves, as symbols of their nonviolent protest. Again a handful of grandmothers undressed before government officials, this time causing one of the representatives to cry. The government delegation returned to the capital without having convinced the community to give up land. A few days later, according to my contacts, the military occupation of one Amuru village was called off.

In September 2015, just months after the victory in Amuru, heavily armed police and military stormed a village in the region and shot indiscriminately. At least two people were killed and more than 20 injured.

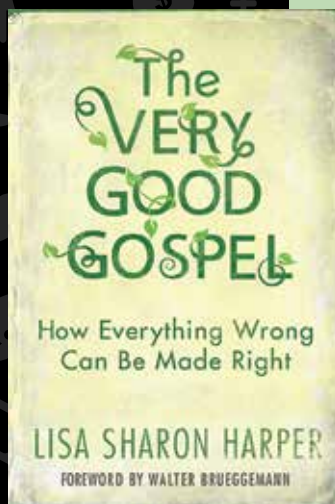
Hundreds of school-children marched with leaves, symbols of their nonviolent protest against land grabs.

Religious leaders visited victims and condemned the act. "Government has a constitutional responsibility to respect human rights rather than violating them because when they do it, it takes away peace from the people," said retired Anglican Bishop Macleod Baker Ochola, a member of the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative.

Since this incident, no large-scale violence by state forces has occurred in Amuru.

Africa is out of sight and out of mind for many U.S. taxpayers who fund military action throughout the continent. In the past U.S. Christians were often part of the problem, as with the *Kony 2012* video. But now Americans can be part of the solution by acting in solidarity with African resistance movements, investing in projects that promote nonviolent dissent to militarism, supporting exiled Africans in the U.S., and pressing churches and anti-war organizations to address the rapidly escalating U.S. military presence in Africa. ■

Phil Wilmot, with Suzan Abong Wilmot, co-founded Solidarity Uganda with a group of Ugandan activists. He lives in Lira, Uganda.



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The Very Good Gospel author
Lisa Sharon Harper

A THEOLOGY OF JUSTICE
INITIATIVE FROM

sojourners

NEWS



JP Keenan

Our Kind of Hero

Armed with a full-body Captain America costume, turban, and witty signage (our favorite: "Let's kick some intolerant ass with compassion"), Vishavjit Singh is on a mission to fight crime—hate crime. Sojourners associate web editor Dhanya Addanki asked Singh how his Sikh faith motivates his work. "We have to see that light that exists in you and everyone else," he replied. "That's our spiritual challenge."

To read more about Singh, visit sojo.net/singh.

QUOTED

“These presidential orders ... are what many Christians voted for. This is the fruit of their political labor, but it's not the fruit of the Spirit.”

—**Stephen Mattson**
on Trump's anti-immigrant executive actions
sojo.net/fruit

SERIES

Healing the Sick

On his first day in office, President Trump signed an executive order broadly instructing government agencies to limit their enforcement of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a set of laws allowing millions of Americans access to health-care coverage. So we asked Sojourners readers: How has the ACA affected you and your family? Here's what you said:



"Without [the ACA], my son might have died for lack of care."

—**Rev. Elizabeth Grasham**
Houston, Texas



"ACA helps millions of Americans and, although I'm frustrated it did not help our family, I viewed it as a stepping stone to one day eventually finding a health care solution inclusive of all Americans."

—**Heather Brown**
Summerdale, Ala.



"My husband is a pastor. Churches usually don't offer insurance as a part of their compensation package. The ACA has made it so we can get our cavities filled, our 2-year-old son can get his check-ups, and there are no worries about taking him to the doctor if he gets sick."

—**Heather Flanders**
Northfield, Minn.



"I suffer from several chronic, rare diseases. ... Thanks to the ACA, I'm not concerned about dying as a result of a clerical error."

—**Adrian Waller**
Wichita, Kan.



"We are in the midst of searching for a diagnosis for my husband for a mystery illness. Our local doctors are stumped. To be blunt, the ACA is the only thing keeping our family afloat right now."

—**Angie**
(no last name given)
Plymouth, Ind.

To read all the responses, visit sojo.net/your-health-care-stories.

Some Thoughts on Identity Politics

I WAS ONCE on a panel with a counselor who proudly claimed her identity as a woman as the reason for her feminist approach to counseling. Toward the end of the discussion, she told the story of a client who frustrated her. A highly educated middle-aged mother of three, this woman (the client) had stepped off the career track to take care of her children. The children were now grown, and she had come to counseling to think through her next steps. My fellow panelist encouraged this client to claim her identity powerfully and express it in public fiercely. The client liked this idea. Some weeks later, she told her counselor that she had gone back to the Catholic church of her childhood and started to attend pro-life rallies.

“That wasn’t what I meant when I told her to claim her identity and

Identity politics added a power analysis into the conversation. But ...

express it in public,” the counselor deadpanned, and the liberal university audience laughed along with her.

The exchange left me feeling queasy. Here was a counselor purporting to empower the identity and expression of a client in a period of transition and then being disappointed that her client hadn’t chosen the identity and expression the counselor desired. And the public affirmation of the counselor in a room full of people who clearly shared her worldview felt doubly unsettling.

Like many of you, I’ve been closely following the raging debate among progressives about “identity liberalism.” There was Mark Lilla in *The New York Times* writing that it was the reason that Hillary Clinton lost the election. And there was Michael Eric Dyson



writing that actually it hadn’t gone far enough.

What’s been missing for me is a way of distinguishing between constructive diversity work and the kind that I understand to be counterproductive. I’d qualify the story above as an example of the latter.

In my mind, constructive diversity work calls upon the broader society to recognize that race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and sexuality are identity markers that matter a great deal to a great many people and consequently pattern much of personal, social, and political life. Multicultural efforts are about achieving pluralism, which I define as ensuring that diverse identities are recognized by our legal system and respected by our social institutions; that there are positive relationships between different communities; and that concrete partnerships are built to advance the common good. These aims are at the heart of the American project. Martin Luther King Jr. characterized it as “the American dream, the dream of [people] of all races, creeds, national backgrounds, living together as brothers [and sisters].”

Identity politics very importantly added a power analysis into the conversation. People who for centuries were not allowed to vote, own property, marry, write

their own history, or simply express themselves are manifestly not on equal footing with those who were afforded such advantages. This shift was essential in recognizing that all identity categories are not starting from the same place in access

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to power and self-determination.

But some of the radical elements of identity politics advanced dogmas that may well be undermining the very values that undergird the movement for multiculturalism. These dogmas include, but are not limited to:

- **highlighting** certain very important identities (race, gender, religion, sexuality) while deemphasizing others that clearly matter in personal lives and social patterns (education, health, geography);

- **assigning** the preferred identity categories a set of predetermined politics, suggesting that all people should think the same way as they do; and

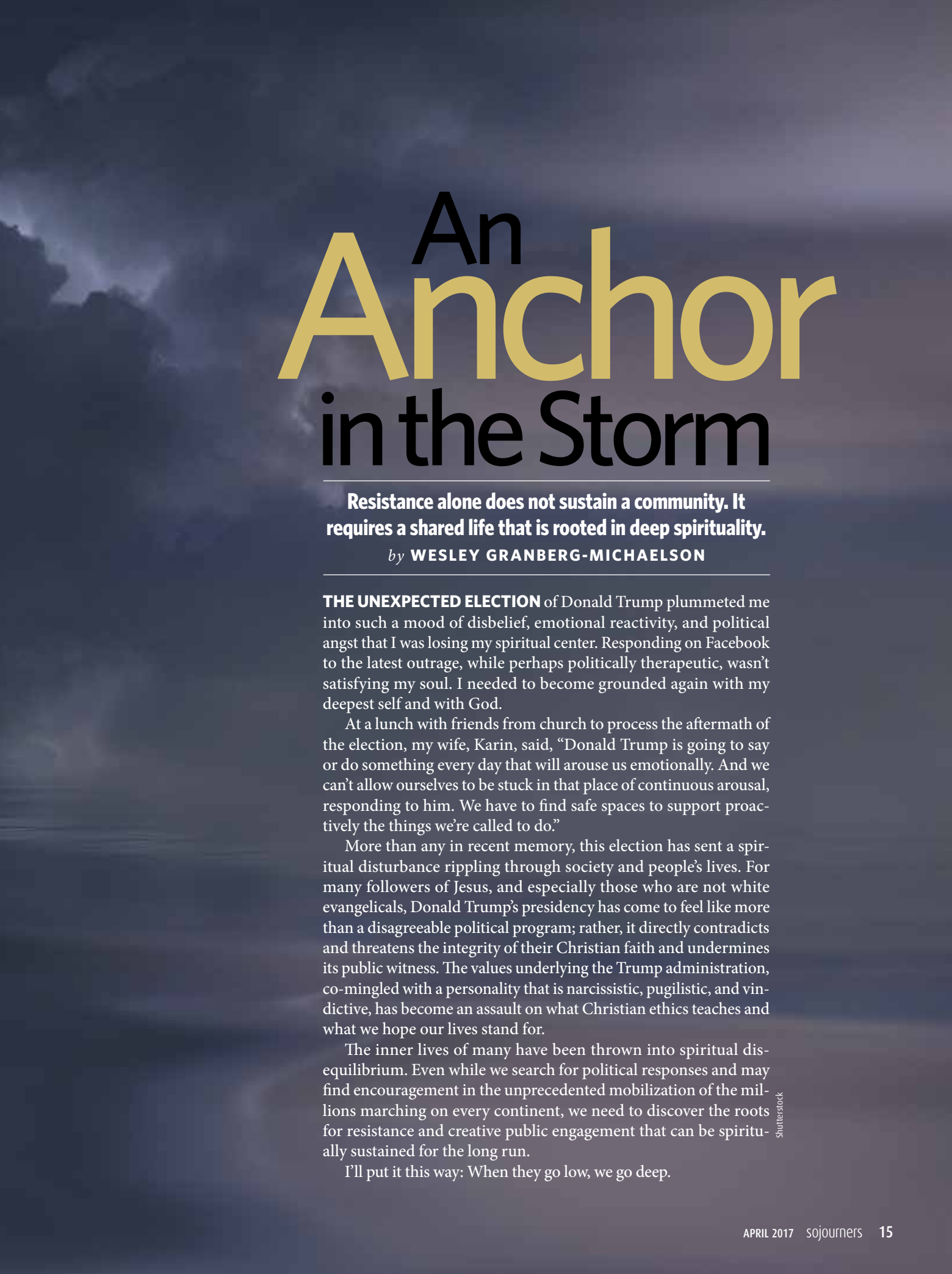
- **dividing** people into the roles of oppressed and oppressor based on their race, gender, or sexuality without much regard to their other identities or even how they understand themselves.

The work of the multicultural movement is too important to allow it to be undermined by these less-productive influences of identity politics. ■



Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, writes about social justice from his perspective as a Muslim American.





An Anchor in the Storm

Resistance alone does not sustain a community. It requires a shared life that is rooted in deep spirituality.

by **WESLEY GRANBERG-MICHAELSON**

THE UNEXPECTED ELECTION of Donald Trump plummeted me into such a mood of disbelief, emotional reactivity, and political angst that I was losing my spiritual center. Responding on Facebook to the latest outrage, while perhaps politically therapeutic, wasn't satisfying my soul. I needed to become grounded again with my deepest self and with God.

At a lunch with friends from church to process the aftermath of the election, my wife, Karin, said, "Donald Trump is going to say or do something every day that will arouse us emotionally. And we can't allow ourselves to be stuck in that place of continuous arousal, responding to him. We have to find safe spaces to support proactively the things we're called to do."

More than any in recent memory, this election has sent a spiritual disturbance rippling through society and people's lives. For many followers of Jesus, and especially those who are not white evangelicals, Donald Trump's presidency has come to feel like more than a disagreeable political program; rather, it directly contradicts and threatens the integrity of their Christian faith and undermines its public witness. The values underlying the Trump administration, co-mingled with a personality that is narcissistic, pugilistic, and vindictive, has become an assault on what Christian ethics teaches and what we hope our lives stand for.

The inner lives of many have been thrown into spiritual disequilibrium. Even while we search for political responses and may find encouragement in the unprecedented mobilization of the millions marching on every continent, we need to discover the roots for resistance and creative public engagement that can be spiritually sustained for the long run.

I'll put it this way: When they go low, we go deep.

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One of the most crucial things for us to do, politically and spiritually, is to gather at the table and hear those words, “Do this in memory of me.”

In doing so, we will need to hold firmly onto five key dimensions central to how we are to live and practice our Christian calling, especially during the presidency of Donald Trump.

MEMORY. Much of Christian faith is about memory. Continually, the people of God are reminded of who they are by recounting the sweep of salvation history. And our memory becomes attached to this version of history because our lives find their value and purpose there. The core liturgical act for the Christian community is communion. This is a celebration of remembrance. As theologian Scott Hahn noted, “Memory is more than just a psychological exercise of data retrieval,” but the “faculty that tells us who we are.”

It’s through memory that our personal story becomes attached to God’s story. We claim our defining narrative.

The flow of news, information, and communication in our society combats the power and purpose of memory. We are riveted to the present, where oversaturated news cycles create daily historical amnesia. This ongoing challenge is made far more dangerous by Trump’s communication style. His tweets drive media attention, and then he diverts that attention by another tweet that effectively eclipses memory of previous days or even hours. Moreover, that allows him to change his story. A previous stance is suddenly reversed and then forgotten as attention quickly moves on to the next thing.

Thus, memory will be crucial for us in the Trump era for two reasons: 1) It is essential for accountability, perspective, and judgment regarding Trump and his presidency. We must literally “bear in mind” who he is, what he has said, and what he has done if we are to fairly and critically evaluate his policies and actions as president.

2) More important, memory—specifically our religious memory—is what keeps us grounded in our story in the face of other competing narratives. Every administration tries to drive a narrative explaining both social reality and the salvific nature of the president’s leadership. But our story is different, told by those claimed by a gracious God, whose love always expands the boundaries constructed in our hearts and in our society, and whose pathways of redemption were shown decisively in the humility and

suffering of a servant. In this time, as in every time, this is what we most need to remember and allow to shape us.

So in the Trump era, one of the most crucial and grounding things for us to do, politically and spiritually, is to gather at the table and hear those words, “Do this in memory of me.”

TRUTH. For Christians, questions of truth and falsehood are spiritual matters. The ninth commandment states, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” This forbids speaking falsely, lying, equivocating, or designing to deceive our neighbor. It also prohibits speaking unjustly against our neighbor. The focus on care for one’s neighbor recognizes that truthfulness is essential for sustaining community.

Moreover, lying, falsehood, and deceit are understood biblically as essential tools of evil. Jesus calls the devil “the father of lies” (John 8:44). Truth is not merely a preferred practice; in Christian thinking it’s foundational to a just social order. Therefore, for objective truth to be in dispute—and falsehoods named “alternative facts”—is not just a political danger, it strikes at the core of a trustworthy society.

Trump has called journalists “the most dishonest human beings on earth.” The role of a free press is indispensable. Remember this: Every authoritarian ruler in the world tries to undermine the public’s confidence in an independent media so that he or she can define the truth. In the case of Trump, his relentless attacks on the media have the intent of undermining the credibility of the press. In that way, his version of events, his exaggerations, and his outright falsehoods will not be held to account. This is how evil works its way into our social fabric.

Biblical faith recognizes that an understanding of truth is influenced by the perspective of the one who seeks it. That’s why scripture’s consistent portrayal of the “truth” about any social order is seen through the eyes of the poor and the marginalized. The Bible has that bias, and it was embraced by Jesus. He interpreted the truth about his society by focusing on the Samaritan, the widow, the oppressed servant, the outcast person with leprosy, the paralytic—all those whom the respectable, self-righteous leaders of society pushed to the margins and excluded.

This way of seeing the truth of society from the perspective of the powerless and oppressed stands in contradiction to the version of “truth” seen from the perspective of rulers. In the Trump era, we must take our stand against falsehood as an act of spiritual obedience, and follow Jesus in perceiving the truth about our society.

COMMUNITY. When young Dietrich Bonhoeffer witnessed the rise of the Third Reich in Germany, he was dismayed by the accommodation and support it received from the state Lutheran church and the strong majority of its members. Bonhoeffer’s conviction was that the form of Christianity dominant in Germany lacked the capacity and depth to discern the threat posed by Hitler and resist it as a matter of faith. So he wanted to shape a community that learned how to confess sins, to meditate daily on texts of scripture, and develop solidarity with the weakest members of society. Bonhoeffer understood that the task was to build a fellowship nurtured by a spirituality deep enough to stand the test of that time.

All this should be borne in mind when we meditate on the polls of religious voters in the past election. Not only did 81 percent of those identifying as white evangelicals support Trump, but so did 60 percent of white Catholic voters and large numbers of main-line Protestants. We find ourselves faced with a challenge like that discerned by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The public witness of so many who follow Christ lacked the spiritual depth and clarity to proclaim the true meaning of Christian faith for the life of society in this time.

Once again, we are in deep need of basic, enduring spiritual formation to acquire both the clarity and strength that equips us to follow Jesus and answer the question posed by Bonhoeffer: “Who is Jesus Christ *for us today*?” We must learn how to “come out” as Christians. And this can only happen in community. The habits of thinking, practices of living, disciplines of praying, celebrations of worship, and clarity of calling can only happen with one another.

The lesson for this time is that Christian communities committed to prophetic witness in society endure when they learn to nurture the spiritual depth of practices that equip

them for the long run. Resistance alone does not sustain a community. It requires a shared life that is rooted in a depth of spirituality that forms and shapes who we discover ourselves to be, and what we are called to do, before God. In the Trump era, as in other times, we need to nurture such communities as integral to our life and witness.

SUFFERING. Richard Rohr recently wrote about the difference between pain and suffering. While we all experience pain, suffering comes from our inability to control certain devastating events in our lives. But it's precisely this encounter with suffering, as an utter lack of control, that can open the way for God's Spirit to break through with the power and promise of new, resurrected life. That's the story of Jesus. And that's the invitation to all who would follow him.

The church that will be faithful in the Trump era will often feel powerless and unable to control events. In that sense, it will suffer—not from direct persecution as much as from its apparent irrelevance, being dismissed to the margins by the powers that be. Today, most of world Christianity lives where it lacks control and power directly in the political life of its societies. At times, it is deliberately and mercilessly oppressed. Yet faith thrives, often with an unexpected impact that eventually has a transforming effect within society.

Of course, some Christians in the Trump era will draw close to those with political power, setting personal misgivings aside, in the hope of exercising some influence on the decisions of the administration. With nearly every regime or government, even in biblical times, such examples can be found. In the best cases, they accommodate themselves to the wishes and whims of the powerful with the hope that their voice might be heard. In the worst cases, they become collaborators with evil.

In the face of an administration so fervently and unapologetically committed to a nativist, exclusionary social vision interwoven with a self-righteous, nationalistic sense of superior global entitlement, the place of the faithful church will be on the margins of conventional political power.

Others are suffering from a lack of control, but they are more vulnerable, lacking protections of wealth, class, or race and

therefore less able to protect themselves. They suffer not only a lack of political control but also from direct threats to their dignity, their health, their livelihood, their homes, their loved ones, and even their lives. This calls us to the final dimension of our faith demanding our commitment.

SOLIDARITY. Pope John Paul II said that solidarity "is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."

At its heart, solidarity is the means by which we live out the truth of Ephesians 4:25, declaring that we are all "members one of another." It is this mutual belonging to a common humanity that lies at the founda-

intricately linked to the sustainability of God's creation. Climate justice is now the predicate of any commitment to the common good. The early moves of the Trump administration have demonstrated a wanton disrespect for the integrity of creation as a gift for all people. Therefore, acts of Christian solidarity in the Trump era must also extend to the earth.

IN THE MIDDLE AGES, Christians who entered a radical form of solitary life, seeking the experience of God through prayer and interceding for the world, were called "anchorites." In her wonderful book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Annie Dillard explained her own experience with that image: "An anchorite's hermitage is called an anchor-hold; some anchor-holds were simple sheds clamped to the side of a church like a barnacle or a rock," Dillard wrote. "I think of this house clamped to the side of Tinker Creek as an anchor-hold. It holds me at

Donald Trump's presidency threatens the integrity of Christian faith and undermines its public witness.

tion of Christian social ethics. While always a Christian value, it becomes paramount in political climates dominated by division, fueling animosity between differing racial, ethnic, religious, economic, and social groups.

Rebuilding those bonds of solidarity, wherever and however possible, has now become a primary calling of Christian discipleship. The vulnerability of three groups requires immediate attention. 1) Young black men and women, perpetually subject to police actions driven, consciously or unconsciously, more by their race than by their actions. 2) From the start of Trump's campaign, immigrants have been a target. Christians now must take steps to implement the biblical promises toward the stranger, the foreigner, and the sojourner. 3) The president's rhetoric about Muslims, and now his actions against those from Muslim-majority countries, doubles down on hostile divisions based on religious difference. Christians need to build bonds of practical solidarity and hospitality with every Muslim neighbor.

Being in solidarity with all people is

anchor to the rock bottom of the creek itself and keeps me steadied in the current, as a sea anchor does."

In this unexpected era of Donald Trump's presidency, threatening to catapult us from one discordant act to another in a swirl of anxious reactivity, we need to find places and persons who will become our anchor-hold. We must examine where we will go, what we will do, and whose company we will seek to provide a steadfast, trustworthy experience that connects our lives indissolubly to God's love. Let us create and name our anchor-hold. From there, we can embrace the qualities of memory, truth, community, suffering, and solidarity that will be so needed in the days ahead. ■

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson is the author of From Times Square to Timbuktu: The Post-Christian West Meets the Non-Western Church. This article is adapted from a talk given in January as part of the Parr Lecture Series, sponsored by the Festival Church in Washington, D.C.



Truth in the face of POWER

**Jesus confronted the “alternative facts” of Rome.
Will his followers do likewise? A Bible study.**

by **RETA HALTEMAN FINGER**

LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY, a prisoner under arrest for treason faced his judge. The judge asked him about his beliefs and his political aspirations. “You can accuse me of wanting to be a ruler,” the prisoner replied, “but all I can say is that I came into this world to testify to the *truth*.” The judge was deeply scornful. “What is *truth*?” he said, and turned on his heel and walked away.

If you were working for a great empire, as was this judge and governor, you would be far more concerned about power than about truth. In fact, later in the trial, the judge reminded his prisoner that he had the power to release or execute him. The judge cared more about enhancing his own power and reputation in the empire than about meting out justice. The life of a powerless prisoner, along with the concept of truth, was expendable.

Today, truth itself may be expendable in the United States. A few years ago, comedian Stephen Colbert coined the word “truthiness” to describe that reality. But in the power struggle of our recent presidential election and the resulting shift in leadership, truth is becoming more and more squishy. Thus the Oxford English Dictionary added a stronger word in 2016: “post-truth,” defined as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” As Oxford’s usage example puts it, “in this era of post-truth politics, it’s easy to cherry-pick data and come to whatever conclusion you desire.” No doubt the fake news we have seen and heard on social media is sure to continue.

**An ancient
faceplate
worn by elite
Roman cavalry.**

Museum of Artifacts

Will people of faith in responsible positions stand up for truth and justice as Jesus did?

The trial of Jesus

As any alert reader knows, the above exchange took place between the prisoner Jesus and the governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate, according to the gospel of John (18:28-19:16). The trial of Jesus recorded here is a literary masterpiece that includes a third character, the cadre of high priests who were in charge of the Jerusalem temple. Issues of truth, truthiness, and political power weave a deadly dance throughout these chapters as Jesus' fate hangs in the balance.

But before we examine this pivotal scene, let's debunk some traditional interpretations of this trial, and then probe the historical background that created the delicate balance of power between the Roman governor and the temple high priests.

For centuries, Christians mistreated Jews, calling them "Christ-killers." John's gospel does present "the Jews" as opponents and enemies of Jesus, but the author is referring only to the wealthy, elite Judeans who run the temple system. It is they, not the ordinary peasants, who want to hand Jesus over to Pilate for execution. And since they are the priestly rulers of the Jerusalem temple, the events have been seen as religious rather than political. In contrast, Pilate has often been perceived as an ineffectual or even kindly governor who tries unsuccessfully to get Jesus released—which only heightens supposed Jewish responsibility for Jesus's crucifixion.

But the reality was very different.

The intrigues of the 1 percent

Palestinian Jews had remained under Persian control until Alexander the Great conquered Palestine and much of the known world around 330 B.C.E. After he died, Alexander's generals carved up the Greek/Hellenistic Empire. First, Ptolemy took Palestine, along with Egypt. More than 100 years later, the Seleucid government in Syria annexed Palestine.

By the 170s B.C.E., the ambitious Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV wanted to stamp out Palestinian Judaism entirely and replace it with Hellenistic culture and religion. You can read about this struggle in the inter-testamental book 1 Maccabees. The revolt of 167 B.C.E. was begun by the law-observant Maccabean family, who were able to fight off the Seleucids, purify the

Jerusalem temple, and lay the groundwork for an independent state run by the "priest-kings" of the temple system. This lasted 100 years.

But by 63 B.C.E., corruption and chaos among the high priests had pushed the Romans to annex Palestine. As was its custom, Rome established itself at the top of the pecking order and then ruled through the high priesthood of the Jerusalem temple, as well as through client-kings such as Herod the Great and his sons. The Jewish historian Josephus, in *Jewish Antiquities*, notes that the chief priests themselves were chosen by the Roman governors, then forced to collaborate with Rome as obedient clients. Thus, the role of these high priests was to preside over the temple with its lucrative system of laws, sacrifices, and festivals—and at the same time protect and serve the Roman occupation.

The Roman governor had the responsibility to settle disputes and keep order, collect taxes, and administer justice. Roman law—like much of U.S. law today—operated with a strong bias in favor of the elite and against those of lower status. Pontius Pilate (26 to 36 C.E.) was the fifth of a string of Roman governors of Judea and was as arrogant and cruel as the rest of them, as Warren Carter explains in *John and Empire*.

Then add to this complicated political system another category: lower class rebels and messiahs who believed God wanted them violently to overthrow the Romans. Such unrest pushed the priestly caste more strongly toward cooperation with the Roman governor and against the peasants, who comprised 90 percent of the population.

Into this mix comes Jesus of Nazareth who heals, feeds, and identifies with the peasants, teaching them that the way to God is not through sacrifices bought from corrupt high priests nor by fighting the Romans. This "rebel" Jesus, handcuffed and exhausted from an all-night trial before High Priest Annas (John 18:12-24), now stands in 18:28 before Pontius Pilate, the most powerful person in all Palestine.

Throughout this trial, Jesus is the pawn within a tit-for-tat honor challenge between these two political power blocs. If we read this scene straight, we will think that Pilate really does want to free Jesus and is a "good

guy." But our author is a genius with irony and double entendre, and things are not always what they seem. Instead, patron Pilate continually taunts his subordinate clients to remind them that Rome is in charge and they are not.

The dramatic impact of place

Notice the seven alternating scenes in this trial, with their outside and inside locations:

■ **Scene 1, outside (18:28-32).** Pilate concedes to meeting the priests outside his headquarters (*praetorium*), so they can (ironically!) avoid ritual defilement.

■ **Scene 2, inside (18:33-38a).** Pilate enters the *praetorium* to interrogate Jesus.

■ **Scene 3, outside (18:38b-40).** Pilate taunts the Judeans with a prisoner exchange.

■ **Scene 4, inside (19:1-3).** Pilate and the soldiers mock Jesus by whipping him, crowning him with thorns, and clothing him in purple.

■ **Scene 5, outside (19:4-7).** Pilate mocks the Judeans by presenting their "king" to them.

■ **Scene 6, inside (19:8-12).** Pilate tries to figure out Jesus, and fails.

■ **Scene 7, outside (19:13-16a).** Pilate pronounces sentence.

Why must Jesus die?

Scene 1 is an honor challenge. The temple high priests have decided in 11:47-53 that Jesus must die because he raised Lazarus from death, thus one-upping them. But if they stone him for *religious* reasons, this will turn the common people against them. Rome must view him as a *political* threat and crucify him for treason. Hence their smart-alecky retort in 18:30, indicating that, of course, Jesus is a criminal. Why else would they have brought him to Pilate?

Scene 2 clarifies that the Judeans have presented Jesus' crime as rebellion against Rome. He is a would-be messiah trying to overthrow the Romans and rule Palestine. "Are you the 'King of the Jews'?" Pilate asks Jesus, who counters with another question: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"

The following conversation highlights the spiritual gulf between Pilate and Jesus. Pilate has no clue what Jesus is talking about (and readers often don't either). The kingdom "not of this world" (18:36) is not a heavenly realm but the alternate community of those who accept the truth of Jesus' teachings and live in this world non-violently. Pilate sarcastically asks, "What is *truth*?" and then leaves without waiting for an answer.

Scene 3. Outside again, Pilate insists the Judeans have no case against Jesus, and shrewdly offers to free him according to Passover custom. But these high priests would rather cope with Barabbas, a violent rebel. (*Lestes*, the Greek word describing Barabbas, specifically refers to revolutionaries in the movement in Upper Galilee trying to overthrow the Romans militarily. They hung out in nearly inaccessible caves and attacked Romans whenever they could.) The gospel author highlights this irony to expose the high-priestly hypocrisy. To them, a teacher and healer who nonviolently undercuts their power is more threatening than an actual revolutionary!

Scene 4. Jesus is flogged (reminiscent of CIA torture to find out the "truth"). He is stripped and beaten front and back with a whip made of leather thongs tipped with metal points. Then the soldiers make a crown from a thorny bush and wrap him in a purple cloak as a parody of royalty. The shaming is deliberate. Ha! What kind of Judean king is *this*?

Scene 5. Pilate belittles the temple priests by showing them their "king." He taunts them by declaring Jesus innocent. But the priests seek to scare Pilate in 19:7 by charging Jesus with the crime of claiming to be "a son of a god" (literally, in Greek).

Scene 6. This charge finally shakes up Pilate, because only the Roman emperor was considered "a son of a god." (The NRSV misses the political point by calling Jesus "the Son of God.") Back inside, Pilate asks Jesus, "Where are you from?" unknowingly echoing the theme throughout this gospel that Jesus is "from above" (for example, 3:31). Maintaining honor, Jesus is silent, finally responding that Pilate has no authority to release or crucify him unless it was given "from above" (19:11). Again, Pilate taunts the crowd by threatening to release

Jesus. They rise to the bait with a counter-thrust: "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor!"

Scene 7. Pilate further ups the ante by bringing Jesus outside again. I prefer the NRSV's alternate reading that Pilate seats Jesus on the judge's bench, and then provocatively calls out, "Here is your king!" Infuriated, the Judeans finally say what Pilate is waiting to hear: "We have no king but the emperor!"

With these words, comments Carter, the high priests repudiate their ancient covenant with God alone as Israel's king (1 Samuel 8:7; Psalm 47:2; 93:1). Their deeper commitment

teacher and healer who nonviolently undercuts their power is more threatening than an actual revolutionary.

is with their Roman allies. As readers, we are not surprised, for the high priests have continually opposed God's messenger, Jesus, throughout this gospel. They have caved in to the Roman Empire.

Pilate has won their allegiance and immediately hands Jesus over to be crucified. But the Judean leaders have also gotten what they wanted: a political execution by Rome, not a religious stoning. No blood on *their* hands!

So the prisoner hangs naked and dishonored for all the onlookers to see and scorn. A mocking sign (19:19) hangs over his bleeding head. It is Pilate's last sarcastic jab at the Jewish leaders: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

Behold the death of truth in the face of power.

But by the end of this narrative, truth will have the last word. Ironically, Jesus' path to glory and honor with the Father is through the dishonor of the cross. "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself" (John 12:31-32).

With whom will we identify?

Twenty centuries later, our nation is confronting similar issues of truth in the face of power. As a white, middle-class American citizen, I am realizing how much I have taken

freedom and democracy for granted all my life. After the election, as I expressed my shock and fear to the small group I belong to in my church, one well-traveled friend reminded us that most Christians throughout history, and into the present, have lived and suffered under repressive governments for whom power was vastly more important than truth. Furthermore, the U.S. military has often wielded global power not unlike the ruthless hegemony of the Roman Empire of Jesus' day. (Think torture at black sites, drone attacks, Guantánamo, and much we are not told.)

With whom will U.S. Christians identify

in the political maneuvers between Pilate, the chief priests, and Jesus? Are we willing to speak and live truth in a "post-truth" culture? Will we stand with people who now live with new fears of harassment and assault? Or is it more expedient and safe to take the role of the religious leaders who compromised their core belief to get what they wanted?

Will people of faith in responsible positions—in politics, in the media, in education, or wherever they serve—stand up for truth and justice as Jesus did? Will ordinary people like most of us make sure we discredit "alternative facts" we hear that we know are not true? Will we refuse to excuse leaders who make deals without regard for basic human rights? Will we identify with the vulnerable people for whom Jesus' gospel is good news, or will we compromise our commitment to the God of Jesus Christ by caving in to the god of "America first"?

"I came into the world to testify to the truth," says Jesus to Pilate. "Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (John 18:37). In this time of political uncertainty, let us listen. ■

Reta Halteman Finger, an affiliate associate professor of New Testament at Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., writes a Bible study blog at eewc.com/RetasReflections.

Grocery Store



Inequity



Why fresh food is often a scarce commodity for low-income people.

by COURTNEY HALL LEE

FOOD DESERTS ARE low-income areas in urban or rural locations whose populations lack easy access to fresh fruit, vegetables, and other whole foods, usually because of lack of easy access to supermarkets. In 2010, the USDA reported that 18 million Americans live in food deserts, meaning more than a mile from a supermarket in urban/suburban areas and more than 10 miles in rural areas.

While suburban shoppers have more choices than ever, urban and rural Americans often lack access to quality food choices.

Karen Gonzalez, a church and community engagement specialist in Baltimore, works with immigrant populations. “For our clients, the challenge is that they work a lot, often two jobs, so getting to the grocery store and then cooking is a challenge,” says Gonzalez. “The other issue is that there are only two grocery stores in that part of town, and one of them is in the gentrified district—a Whole Foods. So clients often end up in bodegas or convenience stores, which have limited options and are more expensive.”

Food deserts in rural regions naturally raise different problems than those in urban areas. It is unsurprising that supermarkets are farther from people’s homes, but it can be overlooked that some rural low-income people do not own or have direct access to cars.

“Driving down a two-lane highway in rural Nebraska last spring, I passed a Native American man riding an old bicycle toward the nearby Omaha Indian Reservation,” wrote Steph Larsen on Grist.org. “We were at least seven miles from the nearest town, and he had four grocery bags bulging with food slung over his handlebars as he worked to climb a hill. I’ll bet a week’s worth of groceries that he wasn’t biking for the exercise.”

Shutterstock



In stark contrast to urban and rural low-income areas, the affluent town of West Hartford, Conn., has two Whole Foods stores within two miles of each other, along with various other supermarkets and specialty stores. The one store that did not survive for long in the West Hartford market was Walmart's grocery store brand, Neighborhood Market. While the town's mayor said he'd had doubts from the beginning that a Walmart would do well in the saturated and competitive West Hartford marketplace, a shopper from the adjacent and less affluent town of Bloomfield expressed disappointment about the closing because "cat food is 10 cents cheaper" and she could always find a "good deal."

Areas like West Hartford have the most options for their residents. The large supermarket chains that favor the economic conditions and plentiful building space of the suburbs often neglect their urban neighbors.

The pride of Rochester

Wegmans, a grocery store chain founded in Rochester, N.Y., in 1916, has developed a cult following of shoppers who love its store brands, elaborate cafes, wine bars, and prepared meals. With 92 stores in six states, the store is among the largest privately held companies in the U.S., earning \$8.3 billion in 2016. The Wegmans franchise has 17 stores in the Rochester area. However, only one store remains in the city of Rochester proper. The rest are located in suburbs adjacent to the city. The stores that are the pride of Rochester have not returned to the city neighborhoods that dearly missed them when they left.

A metro area of about 1 million people, Rochester has the segregation and wealth divide common in many mid-sized, Rust Belt cities. City dwellers have a history of flagship businesses leaving the city limits. Wegmans is no exception, having closed two urban locations in the 2000s. Rochester residents have often questioned CEO Danny Wegman about the lack of city locations. Wegman has responded by emphasizing the relative closeness of suburban stores to the city border (at least for those with cars), as well as highlighting the store's commitment to hiring people from all backgrounds and providing college scholarships for employees.

A 2015 proposal for a new Wegmans in a gentrifying part of Brooklyn, N.Y., drew criticism from United Food and Commercial Workers Local 1500. They urged citizens to send a letter to local officials that stated: "Wegmans has repeatedly closed inner-city stores, has violated workplace safety [regulations], and has recently taken away health insurance for part-time employees."

A store representative did not speak to the allegations that the chain had previously abandoned city neighborhoods. Danny Wegman did tell *The New York Times* that Wegmans' first round of hiring will focus exclusively on residents from three nearby housing projects.

A multifaceted problem

The Flint, Mich. water crisis found its way into national headlines in 2015 when state cost-cutting measures led to dangerous water quality, including alarmingly high lead levels. After Flint made news for its water crisis, media outlets also began to report that the city has a shortage of major grocery stores. It is clear that Flint faces an "overall disinvestment in the community," Richard Sadler, an assistant professor in Michigan State's department of family medicine, told *The Huffington Post*.

More than 40 percent of Flint residents live beneath the poverty level. This makes it an unattractive market for grocery stores. Moreover, Flint's health problems (and those of any low-income community) will not be solved by more supermarkets alone. On the *PBS NewsHour*, public health researcher Steven Cummins described a study he led that found that building more supermarkets in food deserts does not directly lead to better diets for residents, at least in the short term. Individual behavior changes (and the willingness to make room in tight budgets for more expensive fresh foods) are also factors. The study did find that new stores do provide a better perception of food choices.

For the people of Flint, whether a food desert technically exists or whether new stores spur immediate change in eating habits are unimportant distinctions. What is clear is that this community needs better access to both food and clean water, as well as deliverance from the margins on which their zip codes force them to reside.

Transportation and discrimination

While the one-mile radius without a supermarket that defines an urban food desert may seem very small, people living in food-desert areas often have less access to automobile transportation than do their suburban counterparts. This adds to the

such program is the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI), founded in 2010. One component of HFFI, the Department of Health and Human Services' Community Economic Development program, awards grants to nonprofit community development corporations to support endeavors

Food deserts are not a naturally occurring reality but a symptom of systemic racism, segregation, and economic disadvantage.

time and energy grocery shopping requires.

Many city dwellers must wait for a friend or relative to drive them to the supermarket. In other cases, people take public transportation to get to the store and call a cab to take the groceries home. While yellow cab drivers loading groceries into the trunk was a once frequent sight, new travel options such as Uber and Lyft provide a cheaper alternative. However, these services use private citizens driving personal vehicles, which means discrimination can be a problem.

Whether or not to pick up riders at grocery stores is a common topic of conversation on internet message boards for Uber and Lyft drivers. While many drivers are gracious about helping anyone who needs the service, others indicate that they will drive off when they realize that a call is from a grocery store. Some drivers suggest learning the addresses of local grocery stores and cancelling any requests from those locations or giving grocery store passengers a low rating so that it will be more difficult for them to procure rides in the future. While many driver complaints focused on the low fares from short trips and the inconvenience of helping with grocery bags, others used racial epithets and class-based insults when criticizing passengers.

The relatively low-cost transportation offered by the sharing economy, though helpful, does not offer a viable or reliable solution to the transportation challenges facing food-desert dwellers. What, then, are the solutions to this national problem?

Working for solutions

The federal government has launched several programs to combat food deserts and food insecurity in underserved areas. One

such as new stores, farmers markets, and other sources of quality, nutritious foods. As of 2015, the program has awarded more than \$44.5 million to this mission.

In Philadelphia, The Food Trust has made great strides in providing better healthy food options for people living in low-income communities. This nonprofit works to support policy change as well as community-based solutions. Perhaps The Food Trust's presence in Philadelphia since 1992 provided the groundwork for the city's food desert supermarket success story, Brown's Super Stores.

Brown's Super Stores are part of the ShopRite grocery chain, and since 2004 owner Jeff Brown has worked to bring high quality, accessible, and profitable stores to Philadelphia's underserved neighborhoods. Brown seeks to emulate the high-end store experience with samples from delicious in-store cooking demonstrations, carefully stacked produce, and healthy prepared specialties such as collard greens flavored with turkey instead of the traditional high-fat pork products used in Southern and soul food recipes. Brown has responded to the challenges of urban stores by lobbying the city to strategically place transit stops near his locations. His stores have offered community meeting spaces, nutrition counseling, and credit unions, which make the stores gathering spaces. Brown's philosophy is that more time spent in the store means more profits.

Brown's success story gives hope that quality stores can indeed survive in low-income neighborhoods when operated with optimism and smart business sense. With Philadelphia's success in eliminating food deserts, is there hope for food deserts

in other areas? Brown's decision to value low-income purchasing power may be a model for ending the food-desert problem nationwide.

No easy fix

Food deserts are not a naturally occurring reality but a symptom of systemic racism, segregation, and economic disadvantage. From poor air quality to dangerous water to food deserts, life's most basic necessities are more likely to be threatened for the marginalized.

For too long, communities in low-income urban and rural areas have been effectively forgotten by the economy as well as by other parts of society. Those who have historically tried to help disadvantaged communities have often missed the mark. The traditional charitable food bank model ignores the need for permanent, self-determined solutions to the issue of food insecurity. Relying on education by outsiders also falls short, as communities need ownership of their food supply and food habits. The misperception of low-income communities by outsiders, as well as from within, affects the way their citizens value their resources. Decades of being ignored by the food industry will not be corrected within months or even years of opening a new supermarket.

But while outsider advocates may focus on the failure of supermarkets to entice low-income people to buy more fruits and vegetables, there are other health benefits from adding supermarkets to neighborhoods. Eliminating transportation complications, long travel time, and the necessity of carrying heavy loads can improve a person's standard of living tremendously. There are tangible physical and mental health benefits from ease of access, choice, and a sense that society values low-income communities and purchasing power.

Eliminating food deserts is not only a question of healthy diet, but also a question of consumer and social equity. ■

Courtney Hall Lee (@courtrhapsody) is a freelance writer and co-host of the *Dovetail* podcast, a show about the intersections of faith, culture, and social justice. Her book *Black Madonna: A Womanist Look at Mary of Nazareth* is forthcoming.

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A stained glass window at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Va., depicts Moses as resembling Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, who was a member of the church. The window, as shown on the facing page, is dedicated in Lee's memory.



Robert E. Lee Worshipped Here

**A Southern church
wrestles with its
Confederate history.**

by **BETSY SHIRLEY**

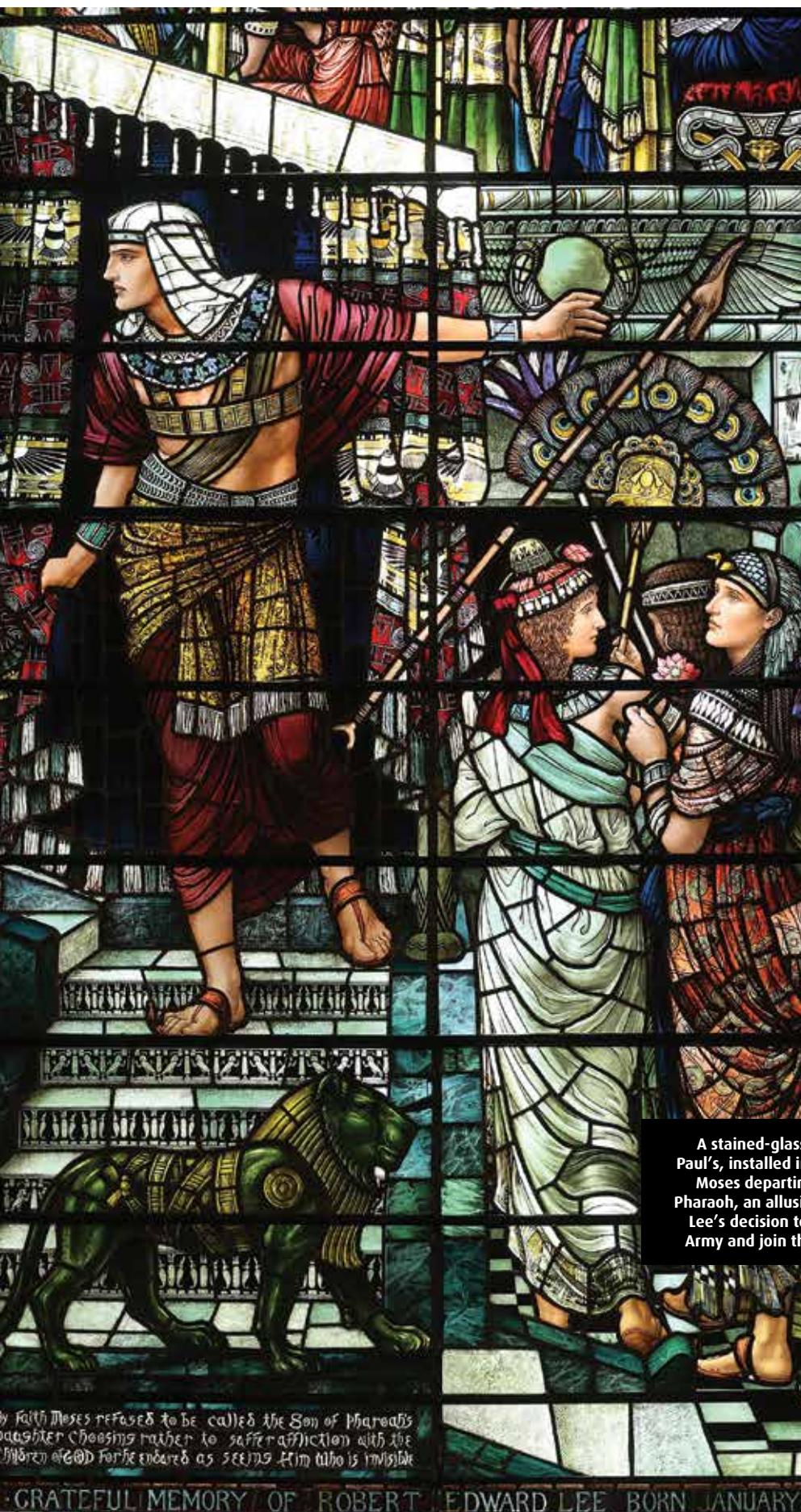
In a sermon that lasted less than 11 minutes, Rev. Wallace Adams-Riley suggested something no one had said from the pulpit in the long history of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, Va.

"What if," asked Adams-Riley in his faint South Carolina drawl, "we begin a conversation here at St. Paul's about the Confederate symbols here in our worship space?"

He listed examples: "The Davis window there, that identifies Jefferson Davis with St. Paul himself, in his imprisonment. Or the Lee windows there, that identifies Robert E. Lee with Moses," he said, pointing around the sanctuary. "And there are the plaques on the walls, and two kneelers up by the old high altar. They [the kneelers] each have a little Confederate flag on them."



St. Paul's Episcopal Church



A stained-glass window at St. Paul's, installed in 1892, depicts Moses departing the house of Pharaoh, an allusion to Robert E. Lee's decision to leave the U.S. Army and join the Confederacy.

The sermon was remarkable in its restraint. It wasn't a jeremiad against the church that had, up until the 1960s, emblazoned its official stationery with "Cathedral of the Confederacy." Nor did it mention the words that would ripple through the congregation in the months that followed, words like "racism," "slavery," and "reconcile."

In fact, there weren't many words at all. Adams-Riley's preaching style is spare and impressionistic; his tone, much like his personality, gentle and encouraging. He quoted the Wisdom of Solomon: "The generative forces of the world are wholesome, and there is no destructive poison in them."

"Generating. Building up. Giving life," repeated Adams-Riley. "Strengthening. Healing. Bringing wholeness. That is what God does. And we, being made in God's image, find our greatest fulfillment in doing likewise."

'We don't expect outsiders to understand'

Adams-Riley is rector of St. Paul's—a historic church consecrated in 1845—in downtown Richmond, capital of the Confederate States during the Civil War. He delivered his sermon in late June 2015, during a span of weeks when the U.S. collectively re-evaluated the appropriateness of displaying the Confederate flag: Was it, as its supporters insisted, a historical symbol of Southern heritage, or was the "Southern cross" intrinsically linked to ongoing black oppression and the preservation of white supremacy?

It wasn't a new conversation, obviously. Flag proponents often echoed the reply from then-South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley's office to a 2011 NAACP request to take the flag down from the state's capitol: "We don't expect people from outside of the state to understand," said Haley's press secretary, "but revisiting that issue is not part of the governor's agenda."

But after Dylann Roof murdered nine people at Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston, S.C., in June 2015, the agenda changed. Photos emerged of Roof posing with a Glock handgun and a Confederate flag, and what had been obvious to many could no longer be ignored by everyone

else: The Confederate flag had to come down. Public institutions, governmental organizations, and religious groups quickly ordered the flag's removal. "We consider the continued display of the Confederate Battle Flag to be at odds with a faithful witness to the reconciling love of Jesus Christ," said a resolution passed by the General Convention of the Episcopal Church.

An inbox of angry emails

By November 2015, St. Paul's had inventoried all the Confederate references and symbols in its building: Twenty-three items, including images of the Confederate flag, memorial plaques ("in everlasting memory of those members of this congregation who served loyally the Confederate States of America," read one plaque installed in 1961), and various objects given in remembrance of Confederate leaders, soldiers, or their descendants.

St. Paul's had also hosted two congregation-wide listening sessions, professionally facilitated by an organization specializing in group decision-making. Some congregants shared that they'd never noticed the Confederate imagery before; others couldn't believe the church had kept it for so long.

And just before Thanksgiving that year, the lay leaders of the church vestry announced their decision: St. Paul's would remove items from the church that contained images of the Confederate flag, including bookplates in the church's library, two needlepoint kneelers, and six plaques.

The decision earned Adams-Riley an inbox full of angry emails, most sent by people who had no relationship to the church. One online petition, started in Tampa, Fla., accused St. Paul's of "purging and erasing history" and urged them "to restore the images" to teach the church's "special and privileged history."

But the vestry saw removing the images of Confederate flags as only a starting point. While they would not remove all references to the Confederacy in their worship space, St. Paul's would begin a multiyear investigation into the church's history, from the slaves who had likely built the sanctuary and the sermons that had sacralized the Southern cause, up through the priests who denounced the KKK from the pulpit, the church's involvement in the civil

rights movement, and its renewed emphasis on outreach in the '90s. And then, using that research, the church would develop new ways to tell the story of St. Paul's—the good and the bad—both in their worship space and in their liturgy. They named the project the "History and Reconciliation Initiative."

A 200-year-old paper trail

After Adams-Riley's sermon, Beth O'Leary started noticing things in St. Paul's she'd never noticed in her 14 years as a member, especially the memorial plaques lining the church's walls. Before, she'd just seen them as

"St. Paul's had the courage to listen to what history had to say when it was telling them things they didn't want to hear."

"decorative squares," but as she started reading the plaques, O'Leary, who recently retired as associate curator of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, found herself asking the kinds of questions she'd asked throughout her career as an art historian: Who were the people who used to worship in these pews? And why had they wanted these plaques installed?

O'Leary eventually helped organize a team of about 20 St. Paul's congregants who are winding their way through two centuries of the church's formidable paper trail: old vestry minutes, financial records, government documents, handwritten diaries, and newspapers dating back to the early 1800s. The team also includes historian Chris Graham, a new member of St. Paul's whose research background is in "the antebellum religion of ordinary white people." ("Absolutely providential," says O'Leary of Graham's arrival). But unlike O'Leary and Graham, most of the volunteer researchers had never worked with historical archives.

When Anne Hayes, a retired attorney, volunteered to do research, pretty much all she knew about the church's history was that small plaques marked where Robert E. Lee had worshipped and where Jefferson Davis had been sitting in 1865 when he received news about the imminent fall of Richmond.



Rev. Wallace Adams-Riley started the conversation about Confederate symbols at St. Paul's.

But as she's entered the names of former St. Paul's members into digitized newspaper archives and sifted through the results, Hayes, who is white, has grappled with history in a new way. "It's just hard to come face to face with the pervasive attitude that

blacks were inferior and not even considered human," she explains. "They didn't have any rights and weren't even seen as capable of managing their own spirituality."

Hayes was particularly struck by an 1854 article she found in a Richmond newspaper. The article details the arrest of four "free people of color" and three enslaved

people who were, "shouting, singing, and stamping" and "holding a sort of religious meeting." Hayes later emails me a PDF of the article. "The officers described the conduct of the parties as being extremely ludicrous," it reads. "The Mayor informed the parties that under the law they had no right to hold meetings, unless in the presence of a white minister."

For Hayes, this is an example of how deeply white Christians believed in their racial superiority. "The white people want the black people to be involved with religion, but on their own terms," she says.

White Jesuses everywhere

Michelle Walker all but laughs at the question. "I mean, have you *seen* the church?" she counters when asked if she'd noticed the Confederate imagery in St. Paul's before it became a congregation-wide conversation. "It's hard to miss."

On her first Sunday at St. Paul's, Walker sat down, looked across the aisle, and saw the gold plaque marking where Jefferson Davis once sat. She was startled. "That Jefferson Davis?!" said Walker.

But she was impressed with the warmth of the people and the congregation's diversity—something hard to find in Richmond.



A detail of a window memorializing Confederate President Jefferson Davis depicts St. Paul in chains before King Herod Agrippa, an allusion to Davis' imprisonment after the Civil War. Davis, a member of St. Paul's, was baptized there during his presidency.

When she came back the following week, Rev. Adams-Riley greeted her by name. She was hooked.

Walker, who is black and serves on the HRI steering committee, doesn't hesitate to share that she's "put off" by the imagery in the church that honors the Confederacy. But that doesn't bother her nearly as much as the church's "many, many, many white Jesuses—white Jesus everywhere." She lowers her voice to an emphatic whisper: "Everywhere."

When asked whether she'd been able to share her perspective on the imagery before 2015, she pauses. "Well, yes and no," she says. She tells about one of her best friends in the church, a woman whose family has attended St. Paul's for generations, many of whom are memorialized on the wall. "What I tried to do is see all that stuff through her eyes," says Walker. "Because to her, they're not expressions of a terrible time in America's history, they're her family."

Walker loves St. Paul's. "Literally the most supportive group of people," she says of a group of women from

Removing the images of Confederate flags was only a starting point.

the church who meet regularly for drinks and conversation. But up until 2015, she hadn't seen the church reckon with its past. "They just decided not to think about it," said Walker. "Like, 'We're not like that anymore, we're moving on.'"

At the same time, Walker knows that the church has worked very hard to live into a different future. "These are people who are deeply involved in our community," she says of her fellow congregants. Wander down the main hallway of St. Paul's parish house and you'll see photos of congregants mentoring local elementary school students, updates about the church's partnership with a village in Tanzania, and sign-up sheets to help Richmond's homeless population by serving lunch or passing out quarters for laundry. Nevertheless, Walker has wondered if the church's focus on outreach partially helped it avoid attention to its own history.

Some at St. Paul's still aren't convinced that more attention to history is the right approach. When Mary Hunter Ayer heard Rev. Adams-Riley suggest the church reconsider its Confederate imagery, she worried the church would try to remove everything Civil War-related. "Some people were saying that we need to make these major apologies and retributions for what has happened," says Ayer, who's been

a member of St. Paul's for 28 years and attended both of the church listening meetings. "But I felt like I needed to

go there and protect the history of St. Paul's."

A lifelong Richmonder and self-described "American first, Virginian second," Ayer is clear: She doesn't support white supremacy, and she's glad St. Paul's removed its images of the Confederate flag. But when it comes St. Paul's Confederate history—or even her ancestors who owned slaves—Ayer doesn't see the need to apologize for things she didn't do. "I don't feel any shame at all," says Ayer. "I'm proud that I go to a church that has such a rich history."

It was her love for history that led Ayer to join O'Leary, Hayes, and Graham as a volunteer researcher. But for Ayer, there isn't a connection between historical research and reconciliation. "I think some people in the church are just trying to reconcile with their families' past, but I think reconciliation means you need to go forward."

Dick Ritsch feels similarly. Since he joined the church in 1974, Ritsch has seen it become increasingly committed to outreach efforts, including a 19-year partnership with Woodville Elementary, a local school in a low-income, mostly black community. Ritsch sees continued community involvement, not archival research, as the key to St. Paul's future. "I think that everybody knows slavery was there and it was bad," says Ritsch. "But I think that what we should try to do is overcome—try to mend things and to continue to reconcile with each other. And not dwell on history."

The courage to listen

But if the dominant attitude at St. Paul's before 2015 could be characterized as "let's not think about it," that's not where most of the church is today. "We need to see, we need to hear—by reading diaries and letters and vestry minutes—what was going on in our past," says Linda Armstrong, a St. Paul's vestry member and chair of HRI. "There are things to celebrate and there are things to ask forgiveness for. But everybody needs to hear that story, and it needs to be told and told and told and told—because it hasn't been."

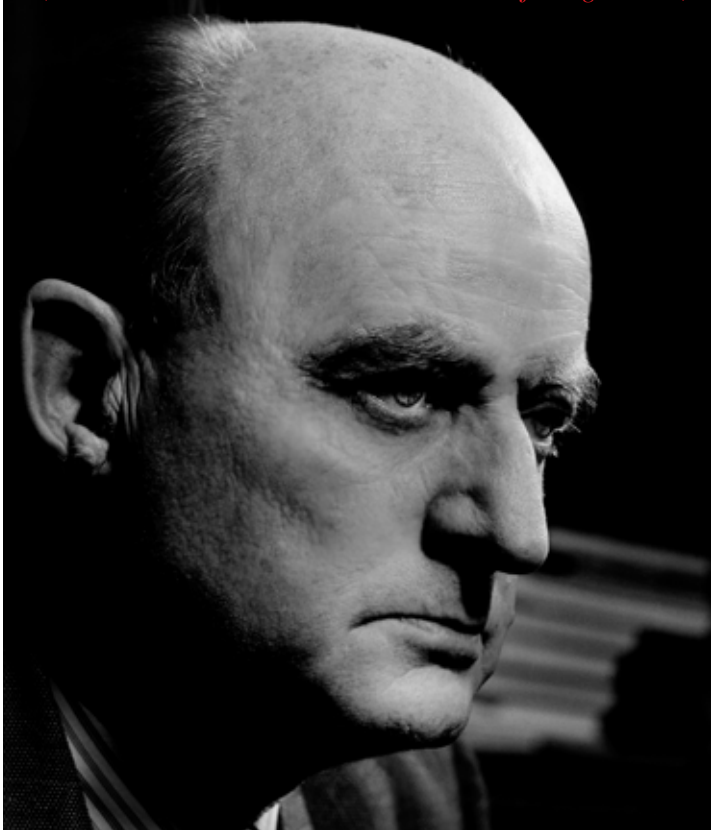
"I think we also need to listen to people who are alive now and see where it is that they've been wronged," she adds. "We need to recognize there is not only racism in our history, but there's still institutional racism today."

Southern historian Ed Ayers agrees. He likens trying to move on without knowing the past to trying to have redemption without acknowledging sin. "How can you move forward without knowing where you've been and taking some responsibility for it, especially if you were the church of Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee?" he asks.

As a local Richmonder, Ayers is frequently asked to talk with schools, universities, and churches that are wrestling with racism in their institution's history. He helped the research team at St. Paul's develop research

Continued on Page 49

from **MARTIN DOBLMEIER**
(Director: *BONHOEFFER, The Power of Forgiveness*)



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Threading the

A worker-owned co-op in North Carolina creates a “virtuous circle” of opportunity for immigrants.

by PATRICK O’NEILL



JUST AFTER LUNCH, Eulalia Francisco shows Molly Hemstreet two pieces of white elastic bands, one of them slated for use as waistbands in a batch of woolen children’s pajamas being cut and sewed by the North Carolina-based, worker-owned cooperative Opportunity Threads.

Francisco, who had just two years of formal schooling in her native Guatemala, has noticed the elastic recommended for the sewing job is not the best choice for these pajamas. She recommends another elastic band.

Francisco is “our master sewer,” says Hemstreet, founder of Opportunity Threads, who agrees with Francisco’s suggestion and immediately orders the correct elastic.

After four years together, Francisco and Hemstreet, both worker-owners of Opportunity Threads, have a strong,

trust-based working relationship. Hemstreet, an Episcopalian, earns the same wage as the other worker-owners and sees Opportunity Threads as having a spiritual component. “Before I met my husband, I thought deeply about going into cloistered work,” Hemstreet says. “I think of that whole thing of prayer and work, and that’s how I come here every day. We’re not making icons, but we’re doing work, and we do things in a joyful, prayerful way.”

The co-op grew from humble beginnings. After completing degrees in Spanish and Latin American studies at Duke University, Hemstreet moved with her husband, Francisco Riso, back to her hometown of Morganton, N.C., to open a Catholic Worker House. The local chicken plant hires many Latinos, but the work is hard and tedious, the pay not nearly a livable wage. So Hemstreet, with no formal training in business, explored the world of cooperatives, thinking it

Needle



Left, Eulalia Francisco at her sewing machine at Opportunity Threads. Above, workers in the main production room.

Opportunity Threads photos by Veronica O’Neill

might be a good path to more meaningful and dignified employment for the Latino community.

The co-op started in a single room with one donated sewing machine, and has since expanded into a textile business that includes six worker-owners, eight candidates for ownership, and eight additional employees who are on salary. "Many of the candidates will be full owners this spring," Hemstreet says.

Following steady growth over the last few years, Opportunity Threads registered almost \$1.2 million in sales in 2016 by cutting and sewing textiles for small companies, making items such as pajamas, dog collars, T-shirts, tote bags and—the co-op's specialty—blankets that create a quilt-like patchwork of a person's T-shirt collection.

The starting wage is \$11 an hour, with frequent opportunities for overtime at time-and-a-half—very good wages for Burke County, which sits in the foothills of the Blue Ridge mountains about 100 miles east of the Tennessee border. Worker-owners earn between \$16 and \$17 per hour, plus bonuses.

The election of Donald Trump sent a chill throughout the U.S. immigrant community as people braced for anti-immigrant policies that the president now has implemented. At Opportunity Threads, Hemstreet says that some things are in a holding pattern as the co-op waits to see what might happen. Some co-op workers are deferring life decisions, such as buying homes, in response to Trump's actions.

"I think our dreams are getting deferred," says Hemstreet, who was born and raised in Burke County. "Before people are making these long-term decisions, I think they want to understand what the environment will be in terms of politics."

'There's no Walmart taking a cut'



Eulalia Francisco, a mother of five who immigrated to the U.S. in 1995, already owns her own home, thanks to her job at Opportunity Threads.

Her daughter also works there, and another daughter attends a local community college. Francisco's family and her husband's family are part of a large enclave of Guatemalans who have settled in Morganton, many of



whom work at the local chicken plant.

Francisco says that working in the co-op changes people's lives. In other jobs, employees are not equal with owners and managers, she says. At Opportunity, she says, she has "a voice in the way things are managed." She adds, "At the co-op you feel a desire to work, to be able to get things done. It's a lot of responsibility."

Last year, the co-op moved to its third location, a 10,000-square-foot warehouse-like building that has enough room for approximately 40 sewing machines, fabric storage, work tables, offices, and other machinery, including three "clicker presses," specialty machines that cut out the front portion of T-shirts that are used to make the quilt-like blankets that are Opportunity's biggest revenue-maker.

The T-shirt blankets, which are sold via the internet by a Massachusetts company called Project Repat, are cut and sewn entirely by Opportunity Threads, with three workers using the clicker presses to cut out as many as 3,000 shirts a day. The co-op holds the contract for all orders from the southern half of the United States.

While the blankets account for most of its sales, Hemstreet says Project Repat's owners "are really masters at marketing," and the project keeps expanding. At the height of the Christmas season, Opportunity can produce as many as 800 blankets a week, with workers on the job seven days a week, earning both overtime pay and a bonus that Project Repat gave to Opportunity at the end of the year.

Another benefit of the blankets is "it's very non-off-shoreable work," Hemstreet

says. "Nobody's going to send their T-shirts to China to have them made into a blanket." In addition, all of the T-shirt remnants are recycled, and the fleece used as a backing for the blankets is made from 100-percent-recycled plastic water bottles.

Opportunity workers have gotten the blanket-making "down to a science," Hemstreet says. "Our error rate is .04 percent; we have a very small error rate on a very complex kind of process." High quality products have become the co-op's hallmark, and they have no trouble finding enough business to stay busy. "At this point the work comes to us," Hemstreet says. "We have people that call us every single day asking to work with us."

Choosing workers who might become owners has been hit and miss, because having the skill to operate a sewing machine is just one component of a good

worker and potential owner, according to Hemstreet. Opportunity tries to identify people with good problem-solving skills, who are collaborative, good at working with people on a team, who accept responsibility for their mistakes, who "don't stir up trouble, no drama," and "who can self-manage," Hemstreet says. "We set very high standards for people. What we found is, a skill can be taught. It's much harder to teach the mindset that's collaborative and participatory."

Much of the co-op's productivity success is achieved by workers who self-manage how they use their time. Hourly accounts of production in the shop are recorded in ledgers, which are used to compute "our costs per minute," Hemstreet says. "If somebody's meeting their quantitative-production goals,

**Working in the
co-op changes
people's lives.**

then we're not losing money."

Workers who cannot keep up their production quota will often spend extra time learning ways to improve their skills. "We know our costs per minute, so we won't take a contract if it's not profitable," Hemstreet says. Opportunity Threads has a good profit margin because "there's no middle person. There's no Walmart that's going to take 85 percent."

Stuffed animals out of socks



Santos Gonon, 34, immigrated to the United States 12 years ago, leaving his wife and two children behind. After four years at Opportunity Threads, he is a worker-owner who has bought his family a home in Guatemala.

Many people leave their country "out of necessity and poverty to come here," Gonon says, as Hemstreet interprets. After stints working at the chicken plant and a furniture factory, Gonon says he's thankful for his job at Opportunity. "I trust in God; everything comes from God," he says. Both Francisco and Gonon are active members of St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church in Morganton, a parish that has forged strong ties with the Latino community and supports Opportunity Threads. Gonon says that while he is very sad not to be able to see his family in person, "I'm also happy because I'm able to help them have a good life there." He hopes to be able to see his family soon.

Most of Opportunity's customers appreciate the fact that workers earn a just wage in the co-op system, have a chance to buy in, and treat one another with dignity. Project Repat's advertising brochure says, "Each worker at Opportunity Threads is part of a collaborative working model, where each employee adds input to the production process and has the opportunity to earn an ownership stake in the company."

Bená Burda is the founder and president of Michigan-based Maggie's Organics, the clothing company that gave Opportunity Threads its first contract in 2008 to make stuffed animals out of socks. Hemstreet met Burda at a co-op workshop, and they've been partners ever since.

"We're absolutely thrilled with their



progress both as a company and as a supplier," Burda says. "We started with a little stuffed animal project back in 2008, and their ability to grow within that project was very impressive." Burda visited Opportunity Threads in January. "Every time we go down there, I'm more excited with the progress and the hope I see, and the difference it's made in the lives of the workers," Burda says.

Giving back



Hemstreet says the worker-owners have dreams of expanding, including the development of some of its own products that will increase the co-op's profit margin. "I think we'd be great at about 40 workers," she says, "because I think we'd still be small enough where we could know everyone, but be big enough to produce basically anything in the world at any quantity."

Because they use a "limited liability company" model that allows for worker-ownership, instead of a not-for-profit model, which does not, it was initially difficult for Opportunity to get start-up grants. That's where the Catholic Campaign for Human Development stepped up to the plate.

"It's very hard to get funding," Hemstreet says. "But the Catholic Church, through Campaign for Human Development, is one of the only groups that will fund—at

a substantial level—a cooperative." Three CCHD grants totaling more than \$100,000 helped the co-op become self-sufficient in short order. After those CCHD grants "we were profitable and on our own," Hemstreet says. "Now we need nothing; we create our own profit."

Thanks to record sales in 2016, Opportunity Threads workers also gave back in the form of charitable donations, including a \$2,000 gift to St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, which has supported the co-op and is the parish home to many of its workers, as well as donations to a local public school. The co-op is also starting a nonprofit that will support workers in Guatemala, the native country of many Opportunity workers.

Hemstreet says her most important work is to pass on her skills to the other owners so Opportunity Threads can grow and prosper without her. "As people of privilege our job is to be deeply in solidarity with people, and I think this is a good example of being in solidarity," she says.

"I have developed a real aversion to charity. I think what we have to look for are true structural, radical ways to do things. I think it's radical to carve out truly just economic models, to carve out new and creative economic ways for people to work with fairness and dignity." ■

Patrick O'Neill is a religion writer who lives in Garner, N.C.

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Interview by Julie Polter

From Stage to **Page**

Harmonizing the vocation of scholarship and the call of music.

JUDITH CASSELBERRY'S ORIGINAL LOVE WAS MUSIC. She has been a guitarist and vocalist her entire adult life, including a 1980 to 1994 stint as part of the duo Casselberry-DuPreé. She now performs with Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely. She has shared the stage with Sweet Honey in the Rock, Odetta, Stevie Wonder, Etta James, and Elvis Costello, among others.

Along the way, while still performing, Casselberry earned her bachelor's degree (in music production and engineering) and then, a few years later, a master's in ethnomusicology, during which she discovered a passion for teaching. So she went to Yale, earning a doctorate in African-American studies and anthropology in 2008. She is an associate professor of African studies at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, teaching courses on African-American women's religious lives, music and spirituality in popular culture, music and social movements, and

Top, Judith Casselberry performing.

Desdemona Burgin

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issues in black intellectual thought.

Casselberry's forthcoming book, *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism* (Duke University Press), employs feminist labor theories to examine the spiritual, material, social, and organizational work of women in a New York-based Pentecostal denomination, Church of Our Lord Jesus Christ of the Apostolic Faith (COOLJC). In the course of her research, Casselberry immersed herself for more than two years in the life of True

as oppressive or fundamentalist, we need to understand more about their lives and what they do, why they do it, and what they gain, outside of trying to filter it through a political liberal-progressivist agenda.

We need to be able to bring more women into our conversations about women, without a particular judgment about their politics. It's critical that we figure out how to reach across these lines and come to some fundamental agreements as women about what we need and the plight of women globally.

We need to be able to bring more women into our conversations about women, without a particular judgment about their politics.

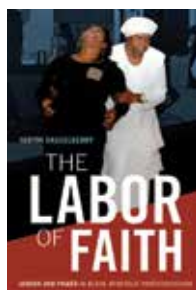
Deliverance Church in Queens, N.Y. She spoke by phone with *Sojourners* senior associate editor Julie Polter in late January.

Sojourners: You examine the "religious work" of women—including prayer, teaching, care for the sick and grieving, liturgical music and movement, and guiding converts. Why did you choose this framework?

Judith Casselberry: I felt that the academic literature was missing a thorough investigation into the vast amount that women do, in any number of denominations or religious systems, that is specifically about developing a relationship with the divine—meaning what that actual work is, irrespective of how it may or may not translate into other political or civic activity.

I looked at how the religious work translates into spiritual power, and how that power functions within the religious community, especially in the institution I was researching, a patriarchal, male-headed denomination.

There is often an assumption about women in religions that liberal (writ large) thinkers view as fundamentalist—that "if they knew better, they could do better." That is really disturbing to me. As a self-identified black feminist, I wanted to *not* take my political perspectives into the research. Given the number of women around the globe involved in religions that some might view



In some conservative churches, women are forbidden to teach men. But in COOLJC, at some points men who wanted to go into the ministry were encouraged to get their initial training at regular teaching sessions facilitated by women. How did you discover this? I found

in the written histories of the church that there were women missionaries [a denomination-licensed lay position for women demonstrating spiritual gifts]. But when I started speaking with some of the older mothers of the church, how this actually operated and what their role was in educating everyone in the church was really spelled out. Sometimes we'll take a role that is gendered and assume that it is less influential—like the assumption that a teacher is less influential than a preacher. This work helped me to understand that isn't necessarily the case.

You write that women in this church (whose professions include judge, bank vice president, and school principal) move between supporting a religiously based patriarchal system and resisting the race-based patriarchal system of a secular work place. How? The spiritual mandate to be submissive to authority pertains to their husband and men of authority in the church, the pastor, the bishop. But once women are outside the church, they don't have a spiritual mandate

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New & Noteworthy



Dietrich Bonhoeffer

AN ENDURING VOICE

Theologian of Resistance: The Life and Thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, by Christiane Tietz, is an accessible and compact biography of this German theologian, executed by the Nazis, whose writings on Christian community, resistance, and conscience hold continuing power in our times. Fortress Press

COME TOGETHER

Deidra Riggs explores God's call to love in a way that crosses all divisions (even race and political affiliation) in *One: United in a Divided World*. She reflects on the aftermath of police shootings of black men as well as the fissures in everyday life. BakerBooks

SONG AND POETRY

The two-volume *Celebrating Wendell Berry in Music* features essayist, poet, and farmer Berry reading his work, music by Grammy-nominated bluesman Eric Bibb, and choral and art song settings by composer Andrew Maxfield based on Berry's work. Volume 2, *All the Earth Shall Sing*, was recently released. wendellberrymusic.org

WE GON' BE ALRIGHT

Stakes Is High: Race, Faith, and Hope for America is a collection of essays by A.M.E. pastor, Huffington Post contributor, and social commentator Michael W. Waters. He is both blunt and lyrical as he meditates on police violence, racism, hip-hop, and the power of faith. Chalice Press

The Niebuhr We Need

NEARLY 46 YEARS after his death, Protestant theologian Reinhold Niebuhr is never very far from the public eye. He's already immortal as the originator of the world-famous Serenity Prayer ("God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."). And just last fall, an article in *Harper's* took up the eternal question: "Where is our Reinhold Niebuhr?" President Obama once called him his favorite philosopher, and Niebuhr is regularly "proof-texted" by polemicists across the political spectrum, especially on questions of war and peace.

In April, PBS will air a documentary, *An American Conscience: The Reinhold Niebuhr Story*, directed by Martin Doblmeier. It will give an even broader public the chance to reflect on Niebuhr's significance, in the company of such notables as Cornel West, Stanley Hauerwas, President Jimmy Carter, and *New York Times* columnist David Brooks.

I was eager to see the film. I've always felt that Reinhold Niebuhr



The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images

always been favored in these pages. During the Reagan era he was often posthumously enlisted to promote Cold War military strategies that rested upon a U.S. willingness to use nuclear weapons. This magazine, of course, rejected that notion root and branch. But there was also the Niebuhr who, in 1946, had called the bombing of Hiroshima "morally indefensible" and who, despite accepting the essentials of the anti-communist creed, broke ranks and vocally opposed the war in Vietnam.

Niebuhr was next resurrected with the onset of George W. Bush's "war on terror." In those days, the Niebuhr of the 1930s, who urged anti-fascist military intervention, was invoked by the likes of Peter Beinart (then editor of *The New Republic*), among others, to justify "preventive war" in Iraq in the name of the crusade against Islamic extremists.

Niebuhr is still significant today, if only because of the influence he exerted upon President Obama. That can be seen especially in Obama's conduct of foreign affairs. From Niebuhr's *The Irony of American History*, Obama seemed to gain a measure of humility about the limits of U.S. power. If nothing else, the author of the Serenity Prayer seems to have given

our former president the "courage" to successfully prosecute the campaign against al Qaeda, the "wisdom" to get U.S. troops off the front lines of Middle Eastern battles, and the "serenity" to resist overwhelming pressure from all sides of the U.S. globalist foreign policy elite to foolishly plunge into the Syrian disaster.

Today, U.S. politics has been driven mad by 40 years of declining incomes for non-college-educated workers. So maybe now is the time to look further back, to the socialist Niebuhr from Detroit who championed the early struggles of the autoworkers and the rights of African Americans.

In any case, all of these Niebuhrs are present in Doblmeier's film. In fact, the movie's sole problem is that it's only an hour long and so sometimes must skip superficially through the man's complex and ambiguous legacy. I wanted more about the influence of the Detroit years. You might want more about Niebuhr's close friendship with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. But for the uninitiated, this hour will provide a mind-opening introduction. ■

Danny Duncan Collum, author of the novel *White Boy*, teaches writing at Kentucky State University in Frankfort.



Reinhold Niebuhr is regularly proof-texted by polemicists across the political spectrum.

was somewhere in my family tree. As a student at a Baptist-related college in the 1970s, I got heavy doses of his book *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Later, I had the opportunity to interview Myles Horton, founder of the mother church of Southern radicalism, the Highlander Center, and learned that Horton had studied with Niebuhr at Union Theological Seminary. In fact, Niebuhr helped fund Highlander. And about a dozen years after that, I gave one of our sons the middle name Myles, in honor of Horton. So how many degrees of separation is that?

However, Niebuhr has not

Continued from Page 41

to be submissive to male authority figures in the workplace. On top of that, they're cognizant and have lived racism in America, so the idea of racial equality is at the heart of how they understand the church and themselves.

For some of us this may feel like a tension, but more often the way they talked about it was, "this is what happens in the church; this is the scriptural foundation for the church." The point being, in order to fully develop your holy personhood, you are constantly working within the framework of how you understand scriptures, the word of God, and how you're going to bring yourself daily into alignment with what you know that to be. Because they are spirit-filled people, they carry themselves with a great deal of moral and spiritual authority.

You immersed yourself in True Deliverance Church for a couple of years—Bible study, learning to pray for hours. How did this project affect your spiritual life? I have a new understanding of the power of prayer and the way that works. Going into it I was definitely a spiritual person, but learning to deliberately stay in a state of communication with the divine, with God, definitely had a deep impact on me.

You cite curiosity about how a Pentecostal upbringing influenced performers such as Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Marvin Gaye, and Sam Cooke as one factor that led to your area of study. What have you learned? Once we're talking about the sense of Spirit-infilling as the core of religious experience, there's both intent and abandonment. You have to be willing to give yourself over, to give up ego, will, and self, and at the same time you have to be very intentional about it. This isn't unique to performers who come out of Pentecostal backgrounds. But I think that was one thing at the core of the people I was listening to and why I was drawn to them.

How has your vocation as a musician affected your academic vocation? I never let go of the performing, and it's completely informed my perspectives and my academic work. The dual streams—or, as I think about it, the lettered and performed scholarship—have worked together quite nicely.

In music and performance, I'm confident



A scene from *Queen of Katwe*

DO UNTO OTHERS

THE INDIAN FILMMAKER Mira Nair—one of the most imaginative, vibrant, and humane directors—told me recently that she sees two frontiers in the spiritual evolution of cinema. Her dream chimes with the notion that the stories we tell don't just shape our lives, but in some senses actually become them.

The guy in the airplane seat in front of me blowing up pixelated images of Middle Eastern desert landscapes is but one reminder of how the boundaries between self and story and "reality" are collapsing. Of course, technology permits us to tell more humane stories too, and to connect across distances as vast as continents. And there are signs of hope as more films seem to challenge the idea that threats must be ended by titanic force. Even some blockbusters depict human vulnerability, or conversation across lines of difference. It is these areas in which Mira Nair invites a deeper response.

She would like to see more balance regarding the action/spandex spectacles in which oppression (or sometimes merely disagreement) is typically confronted—without damaging consequences—by firepower, and those in which imagination plays more of a role in conflict resolution. In other words, fewer films in which things are "fixed" by blowing stuff up.

Nair's second frontier is perhaps just

as obvious, but as with many obvious things, it's easy to forget because everyone assumes it's being talked about by everyone else, or that it's too naive to actually be enacted: Tell stories that "show us life through the eyes of the other," says Nair, who turned such a challenge into eloquent cinematic magic in her beautiful films *Monsoon Wedding*, *Mississippi Masala*, and most recently *Queen of Katwe*, one of the underappreciated gems of the past year. It resonates with other recent gorgeous works of hope and other-seeing such as *Arrival*, *20th Century Women*, *Rams*, *Paterson*, *Loving*, *Jackie*, and *Moonlight*. And Marvel's *Doctor Strange* is also a sign of hope: an action movie that doesn't limit its climax to total destruction.

Mira Nair is courageous—and right—in asserting that the industry within which she works requires a reboot. Imagining what we could be depends on listening to voices other than "our" own. There's a reason why "do unto others what you would have them do unto you" is understood as among the great spiritual teachings. It has always been so. And Mira Nair's films do well unto others. ■

Gareth Higgins is an Irish writer and founder of moviesandmeaning.com and www.irelandretreats.com.

communicating with people in a way that is not the way that we communicate in the academy: Not such a heavy focus on writing, much more communicating verbally and nonverbally, body language, throwing cues, feeling the energy of what's happening in a musical context, feeling the energy and responses of audiences, understanding the real intimacy of working with other musicians—how you open yourself up to spaces that are deeply personal and things that maybe you can't even really articulate with words.

Reviewed by *Julienne Gage*

GANGLAND

***Mano Dura: The Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador*, by Sonja Wolf.**
University of Texas Press.

THE MERE MENTION of *maras*—gangs that formed in the U.S. and then spread throughout Central America—conjures up overcrowded prisons filled with ominous-looking, elaborately tattooed Central American youth flashing gang signs. While this reality does exist, it's part of what German scholar Sonja Wolf calls a folkloric attempt to demonize disenfranchised sectors of society rather than invest in comprehensive social programs.

Her new academic book, *Mano Dura: The Politics of Gang Control in El Salvador*, offers a far deeper analysis of public policy. It's a must-read for any aid worker or missionary hoping to build peace and prosperity in a country with one of the highest homicide rates in the world—81 homicides per 100,000 people, eight times the U.N.'s marker for an epidemic. It also raises important questions about how much violence can actually be attributed to gangs when crime data is patchy and politicized.

The book, an updated version of Wolf's 2008 doctoral dissertation in international politics, examines two decades of attempts to "pacify" El Salvador's gangs, a subculture that diversified and expanded after El Salvador's 1992 U.N.-sponsored peace accords. During the 12 years prior, a civil war claimed some 75,000 lives and prompted 1 million Salvadorans to seek refuge in the U.S. Some of

That informed how I was able to move through this world [of True Deliverance Church]. It really served me well in terms of being able to grapple with different registers of information and energy and not feel like "Oh, that isn't legitimate because how am I going to write that?" Instead I'd challenge myself, well, how *am* I going to write that? How am I going to explain this? All the years doing music, communicating with some really amazing musicians and great audiences really helped me tremendously to be able to move into this world. ■

these young refugees joined large U.S. gangs such as 18th Street or created their own, such as MS-13, then brought their gang affiliation back to El Salvador during mass deportations in the early 1990s.

Wolf's book is more of an ethnography of nongovernmental organizations than of gangs themselves. She says a proliferation of NGOs focused on post-war reconstruction may have actually weakened Salvadoran civil society. These entities, which often rely on international donations, created a newer, more progressive professional niche for locals. At the same time, the NGOs' big donor dependency and need to appease government authorities often watered down their roles as human rights watchdogs.

Wolf contends that these conditions, combined with poorly trained and financed media, fueled sensational accounts of gang-related violence and furthered public outcry over citizen security. This paved the way for ARENA, the right-wing party that ruled El Salvador from 1989 to 2009, to introduce a suppressive 2003 anti-gang plan called *Mano Dura*. It heightened the military's policing role and called for the arrest of anyone deemed to look like a gang member. It did not curb the country's crime rate, but did lead to more overcrowded prisons, extra-judicial killings, and widespread extortion.

Wolf looks at three diverse NGOs to make

her case. The Foundation for Applied Legal Studies attempted, sometimes succeeding, to give gang members better legal representation and develop an understanding of the socioeconomic circumstances that led them to crime. But it struggled to hold the ruling government accountable for its actions.

The Don Bosco Industrial Park, a cooperative-style training ground for poor Salvadorans, assumed its faith-based vocational programs could easily inspire any individual to change his or her life through entrepreneurship. However, it failed to recognize the complex psychological underpinnings of gang culture in a society so full of corruption and misery.

That culture was not lost on Homies Unidos, the country's only NGO to be run by and for gang members, ones who pledged to "calm down" while maintaining that gangs offered belonging and structure.

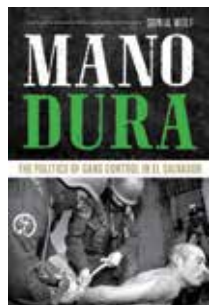
Wolf's incredibly meticulous and long-lensed investigation has special significance for this writer. As cited in the book, I spent the summer of 1997 volunteering at Homies Unidos as part of research for an anthropology master's thesis on postwar Salvadoran youth subcultures.

Homies Unidos sought to provide psychological intervention to confront the constant stress of violence, migration, and day-to-day economic survival. But like many NGOs, its short-time sponsor Save the Children was preoccupied with easier-to-quantify vocational, health, and public relations workshops that would attract funding and political credibility.

These problems were exacerbated in 2012, when the U.S. government prohibited collaboration with gangs by designating them criminal organizations, a policy now upheld by the government of El Salvador. Wolf notes that Homies Unidos' San Salvador branch disbanded in 2012, broke and with its director imprisoned for homicide.

Wolf witnessed years of these kinds of conundrums. She makes it clear that gangs are the byproduct of a long legacy of social exclusion, political posturing, and a preference for repressive forms of security. ■

Julienne Gage is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance journalist who consults with mainstream press and international aid organizations.





A scene from the play *Sweat*.

Reviewed by Stephanie Sandberg

THE BIRTH OF TRUMP'S AMERICA?

Sweat, by Lynn Nottage.

LYNN NOTTAGE wrote her sizzling new play *Sweat* three years ago on a commission from the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. There are moments when artists such as Nottage write at the height of their powers and seem to prophesy about the life of humanity. Certainly Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* or Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* accomplished such prophetic feats, and it's not a stretch to say that Nottage's *Sweat* could do the same. Set in the Rust Belt of the United States, with the decline of manufacturing jobs reeling out of control, *Sweat* may be the timeliest play of this New York theater season, opening March 4 on Broadway, at Studio 54.

Nottage got the idea to write the play after hearing that Reading, Pa., is one of the most impoverished towns in the U.S. We witness on stage the birth of Trump's America, rife with economic hardship in a community that is doing all it can to hang on to its identity, and losing it at every turn.

This pressing drama is set between the years 2000 and 2008, shifting back and forth in time to reveal just how the devastating economic hardships of the 21st century were taking hold. Most of the scenes are set in the town's local watering hole, where we witness the local culture, friendships breaking down, and a serious hate crime that lands two of the characters

in jail. We follow these two directionless young men who are seeking a life that yields more than just another job. We also follow a trio of female friends who have supported one another through it all on the factory floor and in the intimacies of life.

The opening scene is set in 2008, with the two former friends, Jason and Chris, facing interrogation at the hands of their parole officer. We don't understand what's happened to them, but as we puzzle through their relationship, going back in time to 2000, we learn painful truths of factory life in America. In the desperation of this play, we witness the characters get drunker and drunker to drown out the rage-laden loss they feel as their jobs are either mechanized or moved offshore. And while we watch this, we find ourselves sobering up to a recession-laden United States.

The play includes nine characters, all natives of Reading, all locating their identities deep in the community. Nottage identifies them in her script by their ethnic identities, ranging from German American to African American, but America is at their core. They believe in their union, and in their company, as though it's one of their dearest friends. And when that company betrays them, it's a divorce as painful as any human relationship.

Director Kate Whoriskey's compelling,

naturalistic staging and the slice-of-life details of the acting make us into voyeurs peering into a reality we need to understand. How else might we explain the incredible divisions facing the nation now? With all her creative, truth-telling power, Nottage uncovers how such divisions happen and how the ground was laid for a Trump presidency. We owe it to ourselves to see this play, to swallow its lessons and carry them with a newfound empathy into the lives we lead. ■

Stephanie Sandberg is an assistant professor of theater and film Studies at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Va. Her most recent work is Stories in Blue: A Pilgrimage to Heal Human Trafficking, which follows the stories of six survivors of sex trafficking.

Reviewed by Cherice Bock

LIVING WATER

Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice, edited by Ched Myers, foreword by Denise M. Nadeau. Cascade Books.

IF YOU'RE LIKE ME, you care about creation, but have a looming gap between your concern and knowing what to do about it. It can be paralyzing to live in an age of global climate change, environmental degradation, pollution, habitat loss, ocean acidification, lead in the drinking water of cities, and the melting of polar ice caps. Many works of ecotheology explain *why* caring for creation is a Christian imperative but struggle to get to the *how*.

Enter *Watershed Discipleship: Reinhabiting Bioregional Faith and Practice*. We can't easily fathom a plan to care for the entire planet, but we can envision our watershed—the area in which water flows down to a common waterway such as a creek or river. (To find your watershed, enter your zip code on the EPA's "Surf Your Watershed" site, epa.gov/surf.) Imagine caring for your watershed, along with the network of people who also live there. Ched Myers quotes Wendell Berry's rewording of the Golden Rule to explain how this is an act of care for the entire planet: "Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you."

In the introduction, activist theologian

We find ourselves sobering up to a recession-laden United States.

Poetry

BY KATHERINE H. MAYNARD

Kevura

Light dimming now the two friends hurry
to lower the body. Joseph's thumb bleeds,
stuck by thorns when he cradled the head
while servants wrapped limbs in carry sling.
Nicodemus staggers beneath a hundred
pounds of spice-packed jars on his back,
no heavier, he thinks, than the fear which
held him burdened for so long.

In silence they leave
the carrion crowd, wind along stone garden paths,
weave past carved caves. The grave they had readied
for themselves in death, the two now give
the Galilean—though they know now
it was life he had bestowed when first they met
in dark of night, in temple yard.

In silence they perform
the ancient rituals. Wash the body,
anoint with aloe, wind the myrrh-filled cloth
encircling feet, legs, arms, hands,
strips of linen woven under the scarred
small of his back, stretched across his yielding
torso, layer upon layer of burial resin
mixed with aloe filling
the stone chamber with the scent of death.

Light dimming now the two friends hurry
to shroud the head, cover the beloved's face.
Their hearts say *linger* but day is gone
so they pull the stone in place, rush to wash
for Sabbath prayers.

In silence the garden sighs.
Plants furl in the dark. The rising wind keens
the song a thousand spices cannot mask,
the dark a tombed heart
too heavy for even night to bear.

Katherine H. Maynard teaches at the Community College of Vermont and lives in South Burlington. "Kevura" refers to a Jewish burial.

CultureWatch

BOOKS ART MUSIC FILM

Myers defines the phrase "watershed discipleship" as a "triple entendre." It reflects "*a watershed historical moment of crisis*, which demands that environmental and social justice and sustainability be integral to everything we do as Christians." It recognizes a "*a watershed context*"—that we follow Jesus in a "bioregional locus." And "it implies that we need to be *disciples of our watersheds*"—in other words, "learning from, following, and coming to trust ... 'The Book of Creation.'"

This first book-length treatment of watershed discipleship features a roster of authors under 40, based in a variety of watersheds around the U.S. They recount regional history, explore local flora and fauna, and point out deeply

We can't easily fathom a plan to care for the entire planet, but we can envision our watershed.

relevant passages of scripture in which the unaccustomed Bible reader might not even notice an ecological implication. After reading this book, it is impossible to miss how connected Jesus' life and parables are to the Jordan River watershed.

"Water is life," as Native Americans have reminded us in protests of the Dakota Access Pipeline. Drawing on biblical imagery of water baptism, the Jordan River, and the River of Life in Revelation, the authors of *Watershed Discipleship* skillfully connect this theme to modern conflicts over access to clean water across the U.S. and around the world.

Watershed Discipleship calls us as U.S. Christians to radical repentance for our part in environmental degradation. Through retelling our history of colonialism, linking our overuse of resources to the systemic oppression experienced by marginalized human populations, and lifting up the biblical focus on the health of the land as a measure of whether or not the Israelites were following God faithfully, these authors illustrate that our disconnection from the land is a spiritual issue. And through stories of awakening to the intersectional justice issues faced by the land and marginalized groups and forming reconciling relationships with both, they offer hope: that our small actions of care make a difference and give us a literal place to start.

I highly recommend this book to those seeking to unite care for creation with their faith. But it is also suited for courses in ecotheology, creation care, and similar fields in colleges and seminaries. There is excellent theology here, interpreting scripture in light of modern issues while grounding it in specific places and history. You will be challenged to take a step, build a network, get to know the place in which you live, and seek and find God there. ■

Cherice Bock teaches courses in social justice and Christian earthkeeping at Portland Seminary and is a Ph.D. student in environmental studies at Antioch University New England.

When You See Something... Act!

ROBERT HARVEY had a problem. The church he pastors was vandalized after the election: “Trump Nation. Whites only” was scrawled across its sign. His congregants, nearly 85 percent of whom are immigrants from West Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, were shaken.

The Southern Poverty Law Center reported 1,094 bias-related incidents across the country in the month after the election. The greatest number of these types of events are against women in public spaces who are also immigrants, Muslim, or African American. These are assumed to be a “small fraction of hate-related incidents,” as the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that two-thirds of hate crimes go unreported.

Harvey, rector of Episcopal Church of Our Saviour in Silver Spring, Md., decided to take action. First, he reached out to the local community and other religious con-

Active-bystander intervention is what “love your neighbor” looks like in public.

gregations. Second, he signed up for a nonviolence and “active bystander intervention” training.

To understand how to be an “active bystander,” one must first understand the “passive bystander” effect. Research shows that when someone needs help and they are in a crowd, bystanders are less likely to act. The more bystanders there are to an event, the more each one thinks someone else will help.

But, said psychologist Ken G. Brown, when one person takes an action, the passive bystander results are reversed. “We go from having a bystander effect where people are less likely to help to having what could be called a ‘helper effect’ where ... as long as one person actively helps, more people are



Participants at an active bystander training in Maryland.

Felicia Johnson Yoda

more likely to jump in to aid further,” said Brown.

There are four key principles that guide active-bystander intervention, according to Maryland-based trainer Kit Bonson:

- 1. Show** moral courage by acting calmly on principle, not emotion.
- 2. Engage** in de-escalation by limiting the ways a situation might become worse; reduce drama.
- 3. Prioritize** the targeted person by asking if they want help. Don’t take away the targeted person’s agency. Act not as a savior, but as an actively concerned bystander.

4. Ignore the attacker, create a safe space for the targeted person, and ask other bystanders for a specific action.

Hollaback, a global movement to end harassment in public spaces, identifies the four Ds of active-bystander intervention: direct intervention, distract (indirect intervention), delegate (ask others for help), and delay (respond to the targeted person after the situation is over).

Active-bystander trainings are opportunities to practice these principles and tactics in role plays. Practicing with others helps overcome the uncertainty factor more quickly and allows for swift and effective

intervention when a situation arises.

On Inauguration Day, Sojourners partnered with Swamp Revolt, a D.C.-based civil society group that formed after the election, to train more than 1,500 people at 23 locations in Maryland, Virginia, and the District in how to de-escalate conflict and intervene in situations of bias or harassment.

FOLLOWING THE racist graffiti incident at Harvey’s Episcopal church, people from across the country sent cards and messages of support. Four synagogues, two mosques, and other faith groups showed up at his church the following Sunday with flowers, banners, and signs of support for the congregation. Harvey said, “They let us know that ‘love trumps hate.’”

“Resistance can take many forms,” said Harvey, after attending an active-bystander training. “I found [it] particularly helpful as a faith leader. Some of my parishioners encounter racism nearly every day. I’ve given them the advice I learned.”

In an era of increased bias incidents and a climate of fear, nonviolence and active-bystander

intervention is what “love your neighbor” looks like in public. ■

Rose Marie Berger, a Sojourners senior associate editor, is a Catholic peace activist and poet.



The Keyhole of Repentance

THERE IS SOMETHING SPACIOUS about the gospel viewed through the keyhole of repentance. Something to the spare, Spartan spaces that mark a season of penitence. One chapel I know turns its altar so the people can see Jesus' dying words: "I thirst." Another adorns its sanctuary with a bare tree, not a leaf on it. The signs are those of severity. We make a hash of this world. We leave it bare. There is no health in us.

Lent says the tree will not always be bare. We will not always be health-less. And Jesus will not always thirst. Augustine of Hippo says Jesus thirsts for those gathered around him—he longs to drink them in, make them part of his body.

That is, Jesus' own murderers, the oblivious passers-by, his fellow convicts (his own disciples are long gone).

Lent is long. If you're like me or my church, our Lenten devotions have grown a bit tepid by now. These final weeks are good times for renewal. The first weeks of Easter, in the ancient church, were a time when the newly baptized would gather daily to marvel at the wonders of their new faith. So too can we. It's been a year of strange happenings, politically and culturally. Our inclination is to lash out. There is plenty of blame to be distributed. Lent asks us to lash in. We are the first at fault, whoever we are. And then to praise. Try though we might, we cannot stop the Lord of life. And neither can anyone else.



Jason Byassee holds the Butler chair in homiletics and biblical hermeneutics at Vancouver School of Theology in British Columbia.

The mystery of resurrection keeps erupting in advance.

[APRIL 2]

Stinketh to High Heaven

Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 130; Romans 8:6-11; John 11:1-45

LENT IS SUPPOSED to be a time when we hold off on hallelujah. Liturgically, we don't say the "h" word as we repent for 40 days. Resurrection comes at Easter, not before.

But resurrection keeps breaking out in advance in these texts. God can't help it, seemingly. We're busy muffling our joy and God is busy broadcasting it.

The Ezekiel text may be the most gratuitously physical in the Bible: God is the one who opens up graves and puts flesh and sinews back on skeletons. The letter to the Romans promises that where the Spirit is there is life, resurrection, the prophet's empty grave. Lazarus was stone dead—bystanders were worried about the smell ("already he stinketh," says Young's Literal Translation). And yet there Lazarus is again—his worst problem is being bound, mummy-like, by grave clothes he no longer needs. He liveth.

Before resuscitating Lazarus (poor man has to die again—hence this is no resurrection), Jesus does an odd thing. He gets angry

(John 11:33). Others mourn, but he's pissed. He hates death. Hates what it does to us, his people. Hates the delay before all will be raised and made whole.

Tyrants love death. It's their tool of choice to keep folks behaving. But what would it mean not to fear it? What would it mean to have a Lord who snorts at it? What would it mean to be a people who know the grave is only temporary and, until the last day, Jesus sneers at it?

[APRIL 9]

Justice Mocked

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Matthew 26:14 - 27:66

THIS HAS TO BE the strangest Sunday we have all year.

The gospel takes a year to read. Jesus goes from being acclaimed king so universally the rocks threaten to join (Luke 19:37-40), to executed as a state criminal. Many churches

call it "Palm/Passion" Sunday now and commemorate both the great parade with the donkey and the children and the palms, and also the sham trial, the mockery of justice, and the act of capital punishment. If you and they don't leave with whiplash, go back and do it again.

If evangelical Christians over-fixate on Jesus' saving work, mainline liberals tend to ignore it. Progressives don't know what to say about the cross, so we leave that territory to others. These texts give us plenty to say, as Fleming Rutledge makes clear in her magisterial *The Crucifixion*. Jesus unequivocally rejects violence (Matthew 26:52). He suffers with all those abused by sham justice prejudiced against the poor and minorities (27:57-68). He dies abandoned not just by friends, but by his faith and seemingly even God (27:46).

And yet even here the mystery of resurrection keeps erupting in advance. Barabbas is a sign of salvation—set free by no merit of his own, his place taken by Jesus (27:15-23). In *The Undoing of Death*, Rutledge preaches of the three signs—the earthquake, the torn temple curtain, and the raised saints (27:51-53). The author of life here suffers death to grant life to his murderers. We do have something to say here, don't we?

[APRIL 16]

Darkness to Light

Acts 10:34-43; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-18

WE DON'T NEED our best sermon today. The best sermon has already been preached—it's Mary Magdalene's "I have seen the Lord" (John 20:18).

John's gospel loves light and dark. And today starts in the dark. If you have an Easter sunrise service, and you should, you start today in the dark as well. We all do. Soon lights will blare. Trumpets will blast. Tombs will be empty. Creation will be remade like God intended in the first place only better. But not yet.

Our age loves running. Theologian Sarah Coakley jokes about our intention to keep "jogging on (literally)" forever. In the ancient world folks didn't ordinarily run by choice (John 20:4). But tombs weren't ordinarily empty, either. John and Peter see Jesus'

grave clothes and facecloth neatly rolled up. This is no grave robbery. It's an insurrection against the reign of death.

Each of the three characters experiences the resurrection differently—Mary experiences it best of all. She thinks the man she sees is the gardener (20:15). What blue-collar worker do we think is “just” something functional? Not until he says her name does she see and reach for her rabbi. And then he turns her away for a reason no one has yet comprehended (20:17).

Lots of dark and confusion for a day so bright and glorious. But then God is always just outside our grasp, saying our name and then stepping out of the confined space we would give. Jesus is “mine,” for sure. And yet I can't keep him from everybody else.

[APRIL 23]

Dealing in Doubt

Acts 2:14a, 22-32; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31

WHAT A GIFT to have multiple weeks for Easter. We can't pack all the wonder into one day. So the church gives us months.

We are still in John's resurrection stories, which Caravaggio portrayed better than anyone. The light and the dark are as stark and gorgeous as the gospel. In Caravaggio's painting of Thomas, the doubter's fingers are physically in Jesus' side, prying skin open with sheer bafflement. Like the Creator separating flesh to yank a rib from Adam, Thomas reaches inside this new Adam and finds life unimaginable.

This is what God does with Thomas' doubts. What can God do with ours?

The Sunday after Easter is famously a “low” Sunday. The guests are gone, the relatives back in Hoboken, any pastor who can is on vacation. But what if we linger with this story like Thomas? Make physical demands that God demonstrate resurrecting power anew? We might find ourselves among those “blessed” by Jesus for believing without having seen (John 20:29).

Thomas utters the highest Christology in the Bible, “my Lord and my God” (20:28). No doubt (!) he is identifying flesh and blood Jesus with the Lord of Israel, Creator of the worlds. Theologian Teresa Berger grew up in Germany, where her Catholic parents taught

her to repeat Thomas' words in response to the Words of Institution in the liturgy. We can also say them whenever we see Jesus—in his beloved poor, in the scriptures, in whatever hell he's presently harrowing.

[APRIL 30]

Sheol's Tentacles

Acts 2:14a, 36-41; Psalm 116:1-4, 12-19; 1 Peter 1:17-23; Luke 24:13-35

FRUIT HANGS HEAVY in the Emmaus story—Jesus teasing his friends, vanishing as he breaks bread, their hearts burning within them—the story preaches itself. So let's glance at the psalm instead, shall we? How often do we volunteer as guileless a confession as that in 116:1, “I love the Lord”? The psalmist doesn't very often—only here and in Psalm 18. But you would profess your love for the Lord too if you were tangled in Sheol's tentacles, drowning (116:3). Real distress produces real prayer. And then God bends the ear (116:2). Imagine it—God

Easter is an insurrection against the reign of death.

doesn't listen the way we do, simply awaiting our turn to talk. God is all ears.

And we are in pain. This is not just the prayer of a private individual. For the church, the “I” in the psalter is Jesus, praying for every Sheol in which human beings dwell—Aleppo, South Korea, the United States, probably several more trouble spots by the time you read this. The resurrection is not just a trick performed by Jesus. It's God's intention for all humanity, for all creation.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones” (116: 15)—a verse often applied to martyrdom or tragedy. But how is death precious? Not on its own. It's ugly, world-defacing, widow-and-orphan making. But once God undergoes death personally, it's a sign of resurrection. All God needs to bring new life is a grave. Do we have any of those? ■

“Preaching the Word,” Sojourners' online resource for sermon preparation and Bible study, is available at sojo.net/ptw.

Robert E. Lee Worshipped Here

Continued from Page 33

goals and was impressed with congregants' willingness to tackle an immense, emotionally charged process.

“You know, I think people like history to stay in its place and to speak when spoken to, and we only call on it when we want to celebrate something,” says Ayer. “But St. Paul's had the courage to listen to what history had to say when it was telling them things they didn't want to hear.”

Light and liberation

Sun streams through St. Paul's Robert E. Lee memorial window on a sunny January morning. The panel depicts Moses turning his chiseled jaw away from Egypt, toward his people, the Israelites. A pane below Moses' feet quotes Hebrews 11: “By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's Daughter choosing rather to suffer affliction with the Children of God for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”

When Michelle Walker guides visitors on a tour of the sanctuary, she always stops here. She notes that the window was given in Lee's honor because he left his position with the U.S. Army to join his fellow Virginians and lead the Confederate army.

Soft light infuses the sanctuary with what its funders surely intended as the saintly glow of a Confederate general. But it's hard to see the window as anything other than a gross distortion of both a biblical figure and sacred art.

However, Walker has a different interpretation. When she stands in front of the Lee window, she tells visitors that the church is seeking to come to grips with its past. She points out that Moses was an odd choice for what the window was originally trying to communicate. “Moses is seen leaving Pharaoh's house to go and free the slaves,” she tells visitors. “I find that ironic, because that is not what Robert E. Lee was going to do; he was going to make sure that those slaves never got free.” Walker then talks about the importance of Moses in the theology of African Americans, a powerful symbol of God's liberative power for those who suffered from generations of race-based oppression.

“Aren't we lucky they chose Moses?” she tells me. “We can keep that window.” ■

Betsy Shirley is associate editor of Sojourners.

The Trump Presidency, One Year Later

OKAY. SORRY. It only *feels* like it's been a year, an exhausting 12 months of angry tweets, corrosive diplomacy, and cowering federal workers. And that was just in *December*! You remember, don't you? That time before the inauguration when we were supposed to have only one president at a time, and it wasn't Obama?

That was when Donald Trump announced his cabinet nominees, mostly billionaire business people suspected of being woefully unqualified for government service. Then they spoke at their congressional hearings and removed all doubt.

Sadly, we still have nine months to go before we can steel ourselves for Donald Trump's second and final year as president, when many political experts predict that financial entanglements will make his impeachment inevitable. It will be



that nonetheless makes any sandwich great again.

Actually, it's hard to pick out the Heritage Foundation people, since they are disappointingly normal looking and nonspecific

to accept our doctor's diagnosis of Adult Onset Heebee Jeebees—for which there is no known cure—and get on with our lives.

OUR NEW OFFICE on Capitol Hill has already given us a unique perspective on the Trump presidency, although mainly from inside the deli on the corner. It's across the street from the Heritage Foundation, the conservative think tank whose preeminence has grown despite the absence of the words "freedom," "liberty," and "family" in its name. Those words are used in the names of many other right-wing organizations, but mainly because "keep your commie hands off my assault rifle" has too many letters.

The deli is the common ground for the staffs of both Sojourners and Heritage, a place where we take a break from our opposite philosophical trenches, not unlike the German and British soldiers in World War I who stopped fighting at Christmas and came together to celebrate their common humanity. Then they went back to their trenches and resumed fighting over Obamacare, or whatever.

I like to think of Sojourners as the British in this analogy, because they had cooler helmets. And at the deli we're coming together mainly for our common love of sandwiches. Any fighting involves the more personal battle against adding bacon, an unhealthy choice

in their demeanor. Employees of an institution that systematically undermines economic justice and voter rights should at least have unsightly nose hairs or cloven hooves sticking out from their pant cuffs.

Unfortunately, this deli no-person's-land may soon lose its feeling of neutrality as the Heritage Foundation becomes a strong lobby for Trump's programs. It will be difficult for us on the other side to ignore the presence of people who deny climate change, actively lobby against fair taxation, and blithely order turkey and Swiss on white from a woman whose minimum wage they want to lower.

It's hard enough to hold our tongues and suggest they try the seven-grain bread—a more nutritious option—and lose the cheese (you've got your protein already!), much less resist the urge to commit a public act of protest against them, such as pouring ketchup on their shoes. Although, opening up those little packets takes time, especially when your hands are shaking with righteous indignation and they're walking quickly out the door, their nose hairs blowing in the wind, and the distinct aroma of bacon wafting up from their sandwiches.

These moments will call for powerful nonviolent action. But my sandwich is ready, so next time, for sure. ■

Ed Spivey Jr. is art director of Sojourners.

What? It hasn't been a year yet?

an ugly televised spectacle, probably dragging on into sweeps week, but let's be honest: Trump would want it that way. And he'll take pride that his impeachment hearings will get bigger audiences than even his inauguration, where millions of his imaginary friends showed up, although they were too shy to be photographed.

And then he'll be fired. A welcome possibility until you remember who's next in line, an Old Testament Christian whose perfect hair and smooth monotone evokes a preening televangelist right before his inevitable downfall. And if *he* falls, we get Paul Ryan, a man who would privatize his own mother. (Okay, that doesn't make sense. Sorry. Sometimes the writing gets away from me.)

In the meantime, we'll just have

Sojourners Sustainers Circle



Sandy Maben, lower left, and the 1996-97 Sojourners interns.

Journey with us.

"In 1996, my husband and I sold our house and both cars because we had been accepted as interns at Sojourners for one year. We were in our 40s: not the typical profile of the 20-something intern! That year changed my life. When we returned to Denver, I left my banking career to work for the nonprofit Mercy Housing, where I have now been for close to 18 years.

I became a member of the Sustainers Circle as soon as I was financially able. But this past November, I was devastated by the victory of a candidate who embodied just about everything my mother taught me to oppose. I soon turned that unhappiness into a fierce desire to do something proactive and positive.

Not for myself, but for the vulnerable population that I try to serve every day.

I knew right away that Sojourners has been and still is my guiding north star, constant and dependable in the face of these changes. So I immediately contacted Sojourners to increase my monthly contribution. Their presence in Washington, D.C., helps me know that they will advocate and be a visible presence to our lawmakers as we oppose oppressive policy changes and advocate for justice during the next four years and beyond."

—Sandy Maben,
Sustainers Circle
member

If you want to be a part of a community that has been putting faith into action for 45 years, join the **Sustainers Circle**, our network of more than 2,000 monthly donors like Sandy. Your monthly gift—no matter how large or small—helps Sojourners engage in work that continues to articulate the biblical call to social justice in the midst of a changing world.

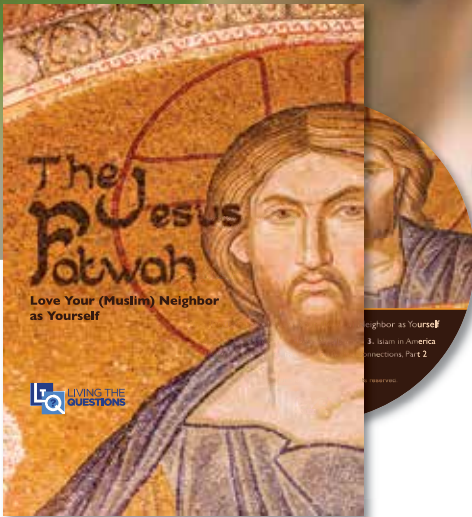
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